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HEALTHY SEXUALITY AND EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

Sexual Health: A Christian Perspective

Sexuality and Spirituality

Woman and Man: Together in Ministry

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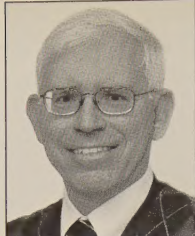
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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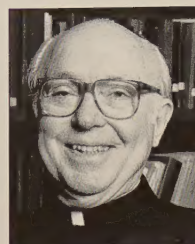
Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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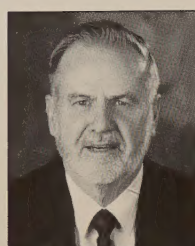
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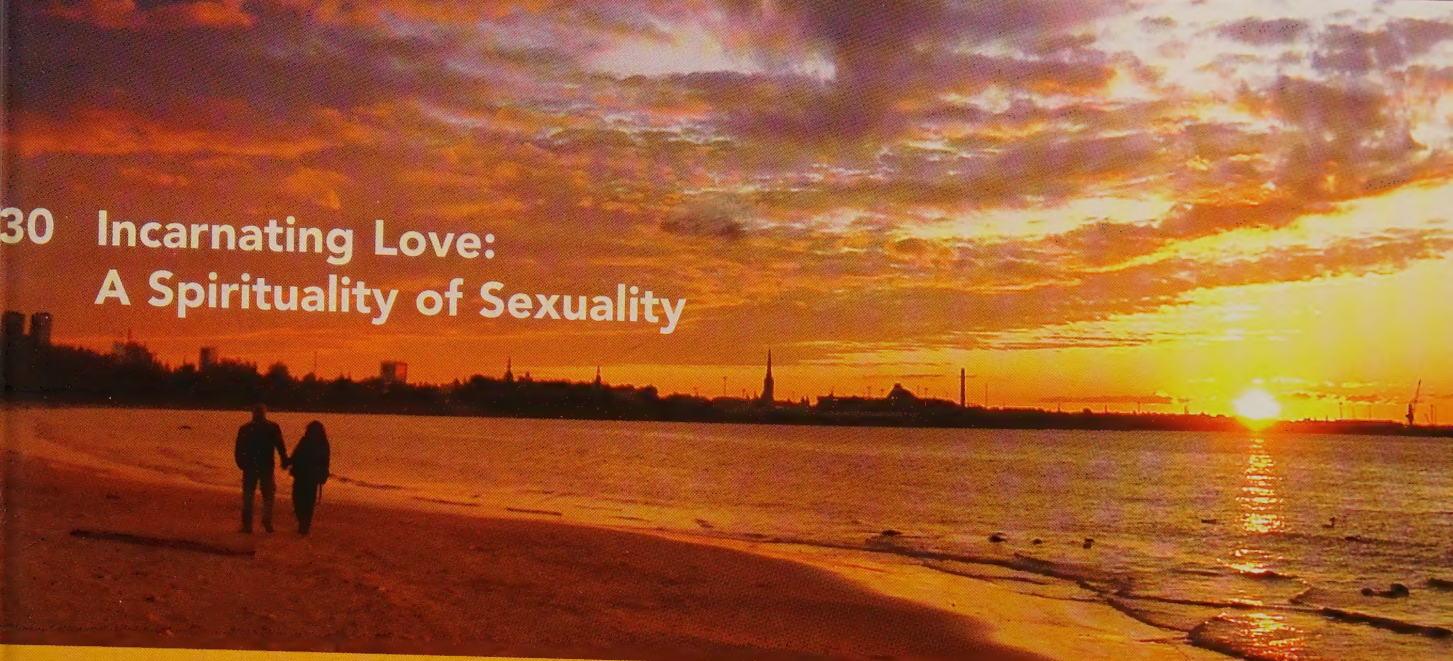
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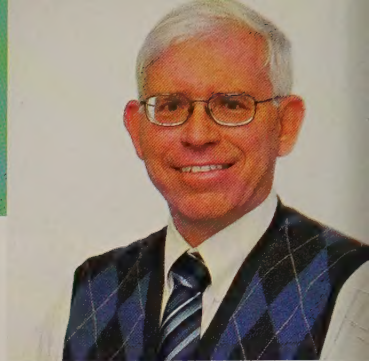
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Editor's Page

Healthy Sexuality and Effective Ministry



What vision of a healthy sexuality does our Catholic faith offer us? As individuals, family members, lay, religious, and ordained we seek balance, perspective, and grace as we seek to live our faith in a holistic way as embodied spiritual people. This issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** offers perspectives on these issues. The subject is certainly too large for one issue of a magazine and the perspectives given here are not exhaustive. But they do offer touchstones on key elements of a comprehensive vision.

This issue began to take shape some months ago when I wrote to members of the Advisory Board asking whether the subject of healthy sexuality and effective ministry would be a timely one for an issue, and if so, what topics we might want to include. The immediacy and the number of their responses affirmed that this was indeed a theme with ongoing importance. In my tenure as Editor in Chief of this magazine, there has not been another topic that has so engaged the Advisory Board and I am most grateful for their guidance on this issue.

As a therapist with varied counseling and formation experience, Kevin McClone offers a foundational article entitled "Sexual Health: A Christian Perspective." In describing a healthy sexuality rooted in a Christian anthropology, he offers six foundational points: First, healthy sexuality within a Christian anthropology must deal with who we are and how we relate to God as we grow on our psychosexual journey. Second, healthy sexuality must involve the whole person: body, heart, and mind. Third, healthy sexuality implies avoiding the sexual dualism that has marked much of the Christian tradition. Next, sexual health for an adult Christian demands ongoing growth in intimacy and affective maturity. Fifth, it is rooted in our real, lived experiences in relationships and involves a developmental journey. And finally, all of the dimensions of healthy sexuality are interrelated.

Deborah L. Sheehan, a wife, mother, spiritual director and lecturer in the Creighton University Christian Spirituality Program, explores these same issues from a spiritual perspective and offers a vision of sexuality as a "powerful energy to bless and connect." She notes that Christian spirituality has too often regarded sexuality as "an unruly force that must be tolerated and contained. There has been little to help people connect their desire for God with their desire for connectedness with each other." Her article will help readers make this connection.

Clinical psychologist Michael Luebbert discusses five areas critical to an understanding of how families promote or inhibit healthy sexual development. He explores the

neurobiological systems of sexual desire, the role of prefrontal cortex in sexual integration, the role of emotional intelligence in sexual integration, the role of the family as a shaper of sexual bonds, and the effects of parenting style on sexual integration. These enlightening reflections will be most helpful to parents, educators and pastoral ministers.

Three articles in this issue explore the ongoing need for fuller integration of a healthy sexuality in the formation of those preparing for ministry as well as those fully engaged in it. James P. Burns offers helpful perspectives on "Models of Healthy Sexual Formation," Luisa M. Saffiotti writes insightfully on "Sexual Abuse and Systemic Dynamics in the Church," and Ann Garrido offers sound guidance on the subject of "Woman and Man, Together in Ministry."

If our sexuality plays an important part in our spirituality, then it certainly has a place in our prayer. Our final thematic article by our former Editor in Chief William A. Barry, "Telling God the Truth About Our Sexuality," addresses how we might pray with this experience.

We hope that this issue will be a practical and thought-provoking resource for you in both your personal and ministerial life.

Robert M. Hamma

Robert M. Hamma

Beginning in 2011 **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** will no longer send subscribers 3 renewal notices. As a way to save on postage and stationery, we will send only 2 notices. The first will arrive 3 months before your subscription's expiration date. The second will arrive 1 month after the expiration date. We will also be sending all of our online subscribers a renewal notice by e-mail. This too will help us keep our costs down. Thanks for your cooperation!

Sexual Health: A Christian Perspective

Kevin McClone, Psy. D.



“What is healthy sexuality rooted in a Christian perspective?” This is a question that has been in the background for much of my work as the Director of the Institute for Sexuality Studies. Having the honor of hearing many of the psychosexual journeys of lay and religious men and women from around the world, it is clear that sexuality is often both the most graced and wounded area of our lives. For some the wound is much more pronounced, for others the grace becomes more evident. Yet both are generally part of the mosaic of our psychosexual narrative. Reflecting on these psychosexual narratives I would like to explore qualities that seem to contribute to a more healthy sexuality within a Christian perspective and present several guiding elements for consideration.

A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN PERSON

First of all, healthy sexuality within a Christian anthropology must deal with who we are and how we relate to God as we grow on our psychosexual journey. In other words, healthy and holy sexuality is rooted in our Christian understanding of the human person. As persons created in the image of God, we have dignity and worth and are called to share fully in a relational covenant of love. This covenantal aspect at the heart of our Christian belief calls us to love self, others, our world and the God of our longing. In our Christian religious tradition it is firmly believed that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. It is in and through that image that we are called to live out our sacred gift of sexuality in a way that honors self, others and God. This will

involve a growing appreciation for both the positive and destructive aspects of our sexual nature, or what I like to refer to as the grace and the wound of our sexuality.

This psychosexual journey begins with a growing self-knowledge and acceptance and leads to a more secure self-identity. This self-identity is further enhanced by a growing acceptance of the fullness of our sexual selves that allows us to risk authentic intimacy with others and God. Each stage of this journey brings new developmental challenges and sexual health will demand attention to each particular life cycle challenge. So sexual health at childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mid-life, and in older ages may appear quite different.

Separateness and autonomy are key to healthy adult intimacy and affective maturity. I cannot be together

with you unless I have some sense of autonomy and separateness that I often discover in moments of real solitude. Navigating solitude draws us deeper into our true self, unveiling the masks and shadow selves that only serve to block spontaneity, freedom, and authentic loving. So to love another or to draw close to another in bonds of intimate connection or friendship demands a healthy acceptance of our true self. To the degree that I grow to love the person I am becoming I am more able to share that authentic self with another.

HEALTHY SEXUALITY INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON

Secondly, healthy sexuality must involve the whole person. Healthy sexuality must go beyond more popular secularized notions of sexuality that narrowly focus on genital sexuality. Any healthy sexuality from a Christian anthropological perspective then will need to address the whole person—body, heart, mind and spirit—within the context of all their relationships. Many have begun to realize that God intends increasing sexual wholeness to be part of our redemption. As Christians, sexuality is a fundamental expression of who we are. It touches our core as individuals. When our sexual energy becomes properly channeled and directed, it can lead to generative acts of love and intimacy that build up the human community.

Yet, when this same sexual energy gets entangled with our needs to cope with stress, to avoid pain, to manage our moods, to manage our relationships or to protect a fragile ego, we end up using sexual energy more instinctively and at times more compulsively or addictively. One example is the phenomenon of “hooking up,” practiced by some teenagers and college students. It is “sex without strings attached” and can become a way to manage one’s sexuality while avoiding close relationships and commitment. I recall how some men that I have worked with in counseling

who struggled with sexual addiction told me that after years of sexual healing and recovery, they realized despite their years of genital intimacy, that they had really no clue about what real intimacy was. For many of them, sex became more about a way to deal with anxiety, stress, fear and avoiding pain than seeking pleasure, fulfillment or real intimacy.

Body

I would like to briefly explore each of these holistic dimensions—body, heart and mind. The physical dimension of sexuality is rooted in the incarnational message of embodiment or the Word made flesh. This means the body with its feelings, thoughts, urges and longings is a place of divine revelation rather than something to be feared or an object of shame. So to be growing in this area will involve a deepening appreciation, respect, and comfort for my bodily demands. Evelyn and James Whitehead capture this message well when they state,

What Christians hope for today is a return to the best beliefs in the Incarnation: in the flesh we meet God; in our bodies the power of God stirs; our sexuality is an ordinary medium through which God’s love moves to touch, to create, to heal (Wisdom of the Body, 9).

Many individuals who seem to struggle with this area have difficulty recognizing and caring for their bodily needs. Whether it be getting enough rest, eating healthily, exercising or living a more balanced lifestyle, they fail to become more intimate with their embodied selves. How attuned am I to my level of physical stress? Do I value my hobbies and have creative outside interests? What about healthy friendships? Do I cultivate a solitude in my life that allows for deeper relating in more real and honest ways? Unfortunately, for many persons who have been wounded through past hurts in relationships,

including sexual abuse, the result is often sexual shame or discomfort with one’s physical body.

Heart

What about the affective dimension of the heart? Sexual health as it relates to the heart implies embracing the whole range of feelings and emotions that we have as embodied persons. Emotional and affective maturity is genuinely hard work that begins with identifying, understanding and expressing a wide array of emotions that foster healthy relationships. This implies cultivating openness to others in mutual respect and a growing willingness to develop skills of self-disclosure, listening and empathy. Ultimately, my growth in affective maturity will flow out of a genuine awareness and appreciation of my strengths and limitations and the capacity to open myself up more deeply to others.

All our emotions are meant to move us in some direction as signified by the root word *emote*, meaning “to move.” Healthy sexuality involves becoming more aware of the movement of our desires, passions and longings as energy to attend to discernment. How can I properly direct this energy if I don’t allow myself to experience it? To grow in love is to experience love, joy and peace but also the anger, loss, hurt and letting go that flow from any disciplined committed love. All human beings experience loneliness sometimes despite perhaps having close friendships and intimate bonds. Growth at each stage of our psychosexual journey implies some capacity to grieve in order to move on to deeper levels of relating.

Healthy sexuality will involve a growing capacity to develop friendships at a variety of levels with same age peers. This implies that no one or two people will be able to meet all of our emotional or relational needs. I may have some close friends with whom I can share deeply, some friends and family that are supportive but where there is less

requent contact, and others who flourish me but at a more distant level and without long term commitment. Friberg and Laaser in their model of healthy sexuality identify these three levels as primary, secondary, and tertiary relationships which are all important to maintain.

Mind

What about the mind and sexuality? In my experience, one of the most underdeveloped sexual organs is the brain. Problems often arise in the sexual sphere of our lives either because we think too little about our sexuality or are preoccupied far too much. Either extreme can easily lead to ill health in the area of sexuality. On the one end, anxiety and fear of sexuality leads to avoidance of closeness with others (asexuality) and at the other end it can lead to acting out impulsively (hypersexuality) out of anxiety, fear or shame. Healthy sexuality seeks to avoid these two extremes by fostering a more balanced style of relating that reflects deeper integration of body, heart, mind and spirit.

In the cognitive dimension of our sexuality, we are challenged to examine our real thoughts, perceptions and misperceptions about sexuality. What is my actual knowledge of sexuality including a healthy awareness of body, heart, mind and spiritual aspects of sexuality? For example, how do I think about my sexuality? What messages did I receive about sexuality growing up? How have these messages either enhanced or inhibited my psychosexual health? Am I growing to become more honest and comfortable with my attractions, longings, and intimacy struggles? What are the messages and thoughts that guide my choices in relationships? Are they based on a genuine concern for the spiritual good of myself and the other or are they more of the need-seeking instinctual kind where I seek to lose myself in the other? Can I distinguish between sexual

desires, fantasies and behaviors? Are there persons with whom I can share honestly my struggles with intimacy?

AVOIDING DUALISM

Healthy sexuality implies avoiding the sexual dualism that has marked much of the Christian tradition. Dualism is the false perception that spirit is opposed to body, with spirit assumed to be higher and superior and the body lower and inferior. While many have embraced the notion of embodiment, many have not and still denigrate or are suspicious of the wisdom of their bodies as sources of revelation. Unfortunately, one companion of this dualism has been sexism or patriarchy: where men identify themselves essentially with the spirit (mind), they identify women with the body (matter), and assume that the higher mind controls the lower body. This has led to unhealthy attitudes that block genuine collaboration between the sexes. Healthy sexuality will involve a growing capacity to relate with both men and women in more genuine and collaborative ways and to appreciate the masculine and feminine dimensions within each of us as true gifts.

If Christians were better able to honestly reflect and examine their sexual thoughts and perceptions in light of gospel values, healthier attitudes might result. When our sexuality is integrated with the best of our spiritual motives, our attitudes about sexuality can be changed in the direction of more healthy attitudes. One healthy attitude is mutual respect, whereby our relationships are marked by both activity and receptivity or giving and receiving. This mutuality is embodied in equal relationships where each person is treated with dignity and respect and avoids relationships of domination or objectification. Margaret Farley reminds us that "if the power differential is too great, dependency will limit freedom, and mutuality will go awry" (Farley, 223).

Healthy sexuality will involve a growing capacity to relate with both men and women in more genuine and collaborative ways and to appreciate the masculine and feminine dimensions within each of us as true gifts.



To think and feel sexual can be a wonderful gift if it serves to inform our loving in life-giving and respectful ways. Another way to say this is that we seek to grow toward assertive sexuality that avoids the extremes of passive sexuality, asexuality, hypersexuality or more aggressive and invasive forms of relating. With assertive sexuality I realize that I have a right and responsibility to both recognize and embrace my sexual thoughts and feelings with their bodily genital stirrings, while choosing how to respond in line with the commitments that form my life's values. This healthy sexuality involves a growing respect for both my boundaries and those of others. If I am growing in sexually healthy behaviors then I am more aware of how to be assertive rather than passive or aggressive in my sexual responses.

The key is integrity with that with which I most deeply value. I have found Capuchin-priest Keith Clark's distinction of "sexual responsiveness versus sexual pursuits" as insightful here. What I hear Clark saying is that we can actually delight in our sensuality and sexuality (sexual responsiveness)

and still make thoughtful choices about how best to respond in line with that which we most deeply value (sexual behaviors or pursuits). To be sexual in a healthy way is to always realize that I have a choice as to how to best direct my sexual energy. Love is a verb not a noun. Yet we often speak more of "falling in love" which implies a certain passive, involuntary experience. Movement toward greater sexual health will open me up more freely to the erotic and sensual in all of life, but in a way that becomes sacramental by aligning sexual behaviors with my deepest values.

GROWTH IN INTIMACY

Next, sexual health for an adult Christian demands ongoing growth in intimacy and affective maturity. For Christians then, intimacy is not an option, but rather as Wilke Au and Noreen Cannon put it, intimacy is "the hallmark of the Christian life." This involves developing the skills that allow for true intimacy with self, others and God. As Christians we are called to experience ourselves as the beloved of

God and to embrace others just as we have ourselves been so intimately embraced by God. We meet and reveal God who is love only through one another. This gift of intimacy is both a mark of maturity and a fruit of the spirit. It is a psychosexual journey that involves growing skills and capacities for more mature loving, yet is also a divine mystery and a gift of God.

A precursor to healthy adult intimacy with others is self-intimacy. All the skills of intimacy such as honest self-disclosure, trust, openness and respect flow out of growth in self-intimacy. In other words, I need an authentic self to give truly of myself in generative acts of love and care for others. This self becomes more real as I shed the masks and false idols that block honest sharing, disclosure, and true awareness of myself and the other.

For how can I share who I am if I do not know who I am? While I may have some adequate knowledge of my personal and familial history, I may still have trouble accepting this self that I am coming to know more deeply. One aspect that is crucial here is the willingness to embrace one's wounds,

mistakes and limitations. This calls for a sexual ethic that avoids excessive judgment and moralism that only serves to increase unhealthy shame. It seems to me that those who are growing in healthy intimacy have learned through time to become more accepting of their strengths and also of their wounds and limitations, and have let go of the need to live up to other's expectations. This manner freedom allows for greater spontaneity and less self-consciousness. Developmental theorists writing on intimacy suggest that any healthy adult intimacy involves the capacity to share more of one's authentic self with a trusted other. Having close relationships of mutual trust frees us to be more real, to let go of the need for pretense and reveal our true selves.

While intimacy may be a noble goal, many persons may have real difficulty in trusting others due to past wounds or violations of trust growing up. Indeed, one of the biggest obstacles to growth in intimacy is the fear of making the risk to trust others. These fears may stem from multiple past hurts, traumas, or rejection experiences in relationships—be it in families, religious communities or church environments. Without facing the pain, loss and challenges of growing up in our relational lives, we can stay stuck in old familiar patterns out of fear, anxiety and shame.

True intimacy within a Christian perspective involves genuine concern for the spiritual good of the other. This is a relationship rooted in a growing capacity for honesty and trust. This will involve particular friendships and intimate others that nourish our own commitments. It is the antithesis of the un-real, the idol, the lust, or mere sentimentality. Real intimacy mirrors who we really are right back at us; it challenges us to be even more than we are. True intimacy is, in short, a confrontation with reality as it really is, rather than how we might wish it to be. So growing in healthy intimacy is about becoming more real. Part of this happens as we experience psychosexual transitions in

life including the challenges, sufferings and hardships that life presents. To become more real involves facing the false self that would shield us from our true self. Here the obstacles may be shame, fear, perfectionism, low self-esteem and all sorts of self-deceptions that keep our authentic self hidden.

Just Love

In my experience, people are hungry for a healthy and holy understanding of sexuality that promotes loving and life-giving relationships. A healthy sexuality will involve making healthy, creative choices about one's life in relationship rooted in core values of justice and love. Margaret Farley aptly captures this notion of healthy sexuality in her book *Just Love* when she states:

If sexuality is to be creative and not destructive in personal and social relationships, then there is no substitute for discerning ever more carefully the norms whereby it will be just (Farley, 232).

She goes on further to articulate the norms of just love that include the following seven principles: Do no unjust harm, free consent of partners, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness and social justice. Many of these principles I have already spoken of in different ways, but social justice adds a unique new dimension worth elaborating. This norm, as Farley denotes it, derives from our obligation to respect relationality, but even more than this, it derives from the obligation to respect all persons as ends in themselves, to respect their autonomy and relationality, and thus not to harm them but to support them. So whether persons are single or married, gay or straight, bisexual or ambiguously gendered, old or young, abled or challenged in the ordinary forms of sexual expression, they have claims to respect from the Christian community as well as the wider society (Farley, 228).

A healthy sexuality will involve making healthy, creative choices about one's life in relationship rooted in core values of justice and love.



This just love approach will involve a growing capacity to resist unhealthy cultural influences that would degrade the sanctity of our sexual nature. In other words, we take a stance against any form of sexual abuse or harassment, the growing eight billion dollar pornography industry, cybersex, prostitution, and sexual human trafficking as destructive to our God-given gift of sexuality as these abuses alienate us from who we are called to be.

Actually, Christian theology at its best has recognized that sin is not fundamentally an act, but rather the condition of alienation or estrangement out of which harmful acts may arise. However, it has taken a long time for theology to acknowledge that sexual sin is fundamentally alienation from our divinely intended sexuality. James Nelson, a professor of Christian ethics, captured this sentiment when he wrote in his article on reuniting sexuality and spirituality; "To put it overly simply but I hope accurately: sexual sin lies not in being too sexual, but in being not sexual enough—in the way God has intended us to be" (Nelson, p. 187-190). Sexual wholeness and healing happen when persons are challenged to move away from fear of sexuality into a healthy embrace of the fullness of sacred sexuality. Some of the obstacles to more passionate living are fear, shame, anxiety, and compulsive patterns of escape. Our allies in psychosexual growth are trust, openness, and a healthy disciplined love that nurtures the commitments of our lives honoring the self, others and God.

Questions to explore here might be: Do I seek to align my sexuality with God's call to love? Do I live in a way that is consistent with my spiritual values? What role does my faith play in dealing with sexual relationships? Is my behavior a choice that honors the commitments I have made or does it draw me away from those commitments? All of these areas affect one another. In other words, as I grow to appreciate

and attend to my body more, I find that my relationships with others are often less stressed or compromised. Or correspondingly, as I nurture the close relationships and friendships in my life, I find myself better able to manage and cope with life and nurture a balanced sense of self.

ROOTED IN REAL LIFE

Healthy sexuality will be rooted in our real lived experiences in relationship and involves a developmental journey. This implies that context is key. So sexual health for a teenager may appear much differently than for an older adult. Psychologists remind us that developmentally we experience a "normal narcissism" when we are children and even as teens, but that as we enter adulthood we are challenged to be less self-preoccupied and more mutual and generative in our loving. As we mature healthy sexuality involves growing capacity to relate in less self-conscious and need-seeking ways. It produces more generative and unselfish acts of life-giving and lovemaking. As human beings we are in a dynamic process of development in our relational journeys and will inevitably make mistakes and experience wounds in ourselves and others.

AN INTERRELATED WHOLE

Finally, all of the dimensions of healthy sexuality are interrelated. For example if a person has not resolved certain sexual issues, like past sexual wounds or trauma, it will affect all other dimensions in some ways. Wholeness and holiness derive from the same root and healthy sexuality calls us to the best of both. When all of the dimensions of my sexuality are growing, I am becoming more loving in the way God calls me to be. Likewise, each area of sexuality that is neglected or underdeveloped compromises our growth in other areas. Relationally, the person may be withdrawn and unable

to disclose important parts of his or her past. Behaviorally, past unhealed sexual wounds may lead to various addictive and compulsive dysfunctional escapes used to avoid feelings. Physically, the genital sexual relationship may be impaired, and physical care compromised, not to mention various psychosomatic complaints that are possible. Spiritually, a person's ability to trust may be impaired particularly in those cases in which the perpetrator is a religious authority.

More positively, if a person is sexually healthy in one dimension there can be a positive impact on the other areas. For example, relational intimacy with a close friend makes it less likely that a person will look for unhealthy ways to meet their unmet intimacy needs. Likewise, if one aspect of our sexuality precedes maturation in another area, problems may develop. For example, part of the difficulty young people often face with integrating their sexuality is that physical maturing often precedes the healthy sexual dimensions of cognitive, emotional and spiritual maturity. This can lead to premature sexual acting out or genital intimacy before emotional maturity occurs, leading to further wounds in relationships. Likewise, many religious men may be highly developed intellectually and cognitively, yet lack the emotional self-awareness and affective maturity necessary for fuller integration. In sum, the truth of our growth in relationships is that they are often messy, mistakes are inevitably made, and it's not always so clear what the right choices are. But if we are seeking to grow into greater sexual health we will be gradually more comfortable and confident with the way that sexuality is a part of all the many dimensions of our lives: body, heart, mind and spirit.

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SEXUALITY FORMATION

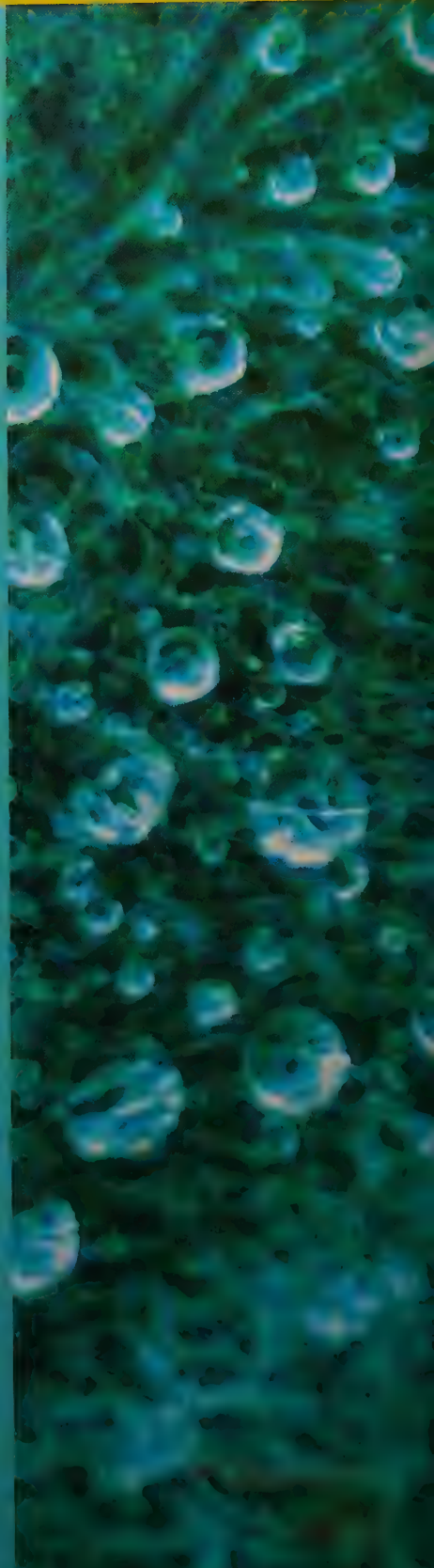
Reverend James P. Burns, Ph.D.

In 2002, the Catholic Church in the United States was rocked by a tidal wave of scandal concerning the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and bishops. As more and more cases were discovered, the church realized the need to examine in earnest the way in which seminarians and priests were being prepared to deal with issues of human sexuality in their lives as well as in the lives of the lay faithful whom they serve. More recent eruptions of similar crises in Europe and elsewhere have served to underscore the urgent need for such an examination. For not only are priests, like all adults, subjected to much of the public media involving sexuality—watch network television on any given night—but they are often called upon to counsel individuals and families who present with problems that have elements of sexuality woven into the complexity of their lives. Additionally there are responsibilities for priests, for example in pre-marital counseling or in hearing confessions, that not infrequently involve addressing the sexual transgressions of others.

Particularly at the forefront these days is the awareness that priests are often associated with and involved in educating children and young people who are still developing their own sexual identities and have many questions and thoughts which they may find difficult to understand and which can make them uncomfortable. The myriad roles that priests fulfill on a daily basis mandate that each priest has accepted his own sexuality and has resolved as fully as possible any areas of ambiguity or discomfort.

The crisis moved sexuality from a topic that had in the past been relegated solely to the domain of moral theology classes and perhaps more recently to some lectures in pastoral care and/or theology of marriage courses to a key formation issue that could no longer be compartmentalized by those responsible for priestly formation. Events that were initially thought to be isolated to certain locales, affecting proportionally few people, were discovered to be far more widespread and involved many more aspects of sexuality formation than suggested by the deviant acts of a minority of priests and bishops. The crisis these events created within the church propelled the Catholic Church's views and teachings on sexuality, particularly related to priestly life and ministry, onto the public stage and aroused careful, exhaustive scrutiny by the general population and the media.

The abuse scandal, though fraught with many terrible consequences—especially for abused minors and their families—did bring about two constructive effects to ecclesial life: the mandatory creation of safe environment programs to protect



FOR CHURCH LEADERS

TOWARD A HEALTHY, BALANCED APPROACH



children along with the implementation of zero tolerance policies for offenders and a closer examination of the sexual formation of the men who aspire to be priests.

PREPARING SEMINARIANS AND CLERGY FOR INTEGRATION OF SEXUALITY

Even before the watershed events of the sexual abuse crisis of 2002, some writers and scholars were concerned with the manner in which sexual formation and identity were being addressed within the priesthood and in the context of priestly formation (Cozzens, 2000; Plante, 1996; Rossetti, 1995; Rossetti, 1996). These authors pointed to the need for an examination of concerns related to sexuality and human formation, and not solely as a result of the problems the sexual abuse of minors had caused; instead many went further to begin a discussion of the contexts within which formation takes place. In so doing they brought to the fore concerns over the manner in which seminarians and priests had been and were being formed in the areas of sexual identity and human development. However, it was not until 2002 that the sexual abuse crisis focused a spotlight, in a more urgent manner, on how seminarians, priests, and religious had been trained to deal with sex and sexuality—their own and that of others. It also brought about a renewed interest by concerned individuals into the church's overall approach to the subject. To a lesser, though no less important extent, the crisis also brought to light the need for appropriate training for permanent deacons and lay ministers in areas of sexuality, particularly in their relationships to children and youth.

As cases of sexual abuse of minors surfaced, the media, legal profession and others seemed to emphasize and focus solely on the deviant and criminal behavior of the accused clerics. Yet, the normal sexuality that remains a part of

every priest's life (and in fact the majority of priests in this case) received significantly less attention. However, the official church demonstrated a commitment toward discussing healthy, normal sexuality in terms of her teachings and official writings relating this aspect to the importance of overall pastoral health and well being (Benedict XVI, 2005; John Paul II, 1999). At the same time though, the church continues to be challenged in moving from knowledge about these issues to engaging them in practice.

Some writers (Gregoire and Jungers, 2004) suggest that there remain among those forming seminarians some who treat the issues around sexuality as if this normal aspect of their humanity ceases with ordination or that pious practices alone are sufficient to manage it, which certainly isn't realistic. Despite what would seem a reversion to an historical attempt by some in the church to leave sexuality formation to a few moral theology classes, or worse demonize it as something to be feared and tightly controlled (Francis and Turner, 1995; Rohlheiser, 1999), it simply can no longer be regarded in such a manner. The importance of one's overall health and wellbeing along with the complexity of living a celibate or chaste life demands greater and more thorough attention.

Even a cursory review of the way in which sexuality is regarded (and often demeaned) in the modern culture suggests the need to address the issue head on if these men are to have healthy and balanced affective lives. Baars (1971) suggested such more than three decades ago. In his extensive review of the many priests he had treated he expressed his very real concern over the relationship between emotional/affective maturity with healthy self-acceptance and sexuality in clergy. He relates that his "clinical observation over many years have convinced us that priests in general—and some to an extreme degree—possess an insufficiently

developed or distorted emotional life" (p. 10). It remains unclear how much has significantly changed since then. Therefore, the sexuality of the individual priest needs to be addressed forthrightly in the seminary in a sensitive and compassionate manner, i.e., during early or proximal formation stages, with a special focus on the connection of sexuality to their emotional life. In this manner related issues can then be effectively addressed both within the clergy and later for the lay population to whom they will minister.

This is not to say that the personal experience of men aspiring to become priests is unimportant or negligible. Like all adults these men have had education (some more than others) about sexuality and have been exposed to experiences that by necessity have included some elements of their sexuality. In fact, some men who become priests have reported having had sexual experiences themselves before entering seminary which, although set aside through the vow of chastity or the promise of celibacy, continue to influence their own thoughts and feelings about sexual issues. Yet these experiences alone do not provide these men the appropriate context within which to understand the complexity of their sexuality. Therefore, in addition to attending to their background experiences, attention needs to focus on the content that should be included in the education of the seminarian to prepare him at a minimum to successfully navigate his own sexuality as well as to interact with parishioners who have issues and problems involving sex.

Importantly, the U.S. Catholic bishops in their document on priestly formation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006) highlight the significance of human, spiritual, pastoral and intellectual formation of those who would be priests. In particular note is made of the need for "Seminary formation in sexuality and celibacy [that] must communicate to priesthood

candidates and enable them to appropriate the physiological and psychological understanding of human sexuality [as well as] the meaning of the virtue of chastity; this includes a formation in authentic ideals of sexual maturity and chastity, including virginity . . .” (p. 32). The emphasis here, as in the John Jay Study (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009), is consistent with their insistence upon in-depth exposure to human formation elements that provide fuller exploration of healthy approaches to sexuality.

Good human formation involves healthy sexual formation and integration. The scandal has demonstrated a need for *a priori* programs; i.e., programs that will prevent these occurrences in the first place. What is needed is a primary prevention strategy not unlike those crafted according to community mental health models. This would include the creation and implementation of effective, pastorally-oriented human development programs such as the bishops (2006) recommend, that have as a key component effective human sexual formation with the goal of assisting clergy toward fuller integration in the area of sexuality both as a core component of their own development and especially as a key element of maturity within their religious roles. The focus of such a program is not only as a response to the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable others but equally importantly to allow for more authentic, happier and holier leaders in the church who can successfully assist others. Such

a program would equip religious leaders to provide effective guidance and counseling concerning sexual matters as Ott (2009) and colleagues suggest in their comprehensive study on sexuality education in seminaries:

Religious leaders have the potential to change societal understanding of sexuality through the power of the pulpit, pastoral care of individuals and families, and their presence in the media, politics, and civil society. At a time when many denominations and faith communities are embroiled in sexuality issues, there is an urgent need for leaders who understand the connections between religion and sexuality.

Seminaries are not providing future religious leaders with sufficient opportunities for study, self assessment, and ministerial formation in sexuality. They are also not providing seminarians with the skills they will need to minister to their congregants and communities, or to become effective advocates where sexuality issues are concerned (p. 4).

ELEMENTS OF SEXUALITY FORMATION

In focusing on essential elements of human sexuality in the formation of religious leaders, especially clergy, three key areas can be identified: education,


human growth and development, and spirituality. All of these are essential for a fully integrated pastoral life. For purposes here they are singularly developed, however in practice these elements contain areas of overlap and reciprocal influence.

Education

Education needs to include a history of the understanding of sex and sexuality. Maddock (1997) relates seven important considerations concerning historical aspects of sexuality education. This includes a recognition that sexuality education is “a particular case of a more general issue characterizing human experience” and that as such requires an appreciation for the importance of the lived experience of both the teacher and student, as these necessarily color the perspective from which one approaches this topic (Maddock, p. 17). In addition it is acknowledged that any approach to sexuality education must balance rights of individuals over and against the common good. It is only in such an approach that the “dialectic balance of individual and community can be sustained” (p. 17). When this has not been the case historically, such approaches to sex and sexuality have been fraught with great apprehension and even violence.

It is further argued that sexuality formation finds its primary source in the family. By extension, Maddock relates that “sexuality education occurs in close relationships” thus suggesting that any educational attempts must appreciate the norms and meanings transmitted by

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the family and in this case the Catholic family. Further, he suggests that any such discussion of sexuality education must consider and incorporate broader questions related to overarching existential concerns. In addition, the global nature of communication requires that sexuality education and formation attend to the electronic phenomenon that affects nearly every person in the Western world, thus requiring a wise, discerning approach that incorporates an ethical stance. The final elements to such an approach to human sexuality education respects both the need for a “dialectical synthesis [in] transforming all of the tensions that characterize sexuality” (p. 19) as well as an approach that will lend itself to initial and ongoing examination, offering data that support such a program’s overall effectiveness in achieving its aims.

While Maddock approaches this discussion of sexuality education from a secular, historical perspective, certain elements would be helpful to understand and to engage relative to the formation of seminarians in sexuality health, though with a Catholic perspective on the human person and chaste love. As Pope John Paul II (1999) expressed, “In such a context, an education for sexuality becomes more difficult but also more urgent. It should be truly and fully personal and therefore should present chastity in a manner that shows appreciation and love” (p. 86).

Nor can sexuality formation be divorced from praxis in which the

theoretical elements encounter real world and real life situations of both seminarians and priests and subsequently those to whom they are called to serve. Seeking as it were the integration of knowledge and practice in identity formation in regard to sex and sexuality “with religious commitment and moral integrity” (p. 457), as Foster (2008) suggests, is a non-negotiable. Further, since so much of sex and sexuality education in the past has been shrouded under a veiled approach, any advance toward praxis must at one and the same time respect its history as well as its inherent mystery, thereby “developing the competence and confidence to discuss that which is hidden” (p. 462). At the same time this component of seminary education will strive against the potential for ignorance, hypocrisy, or idolatry that exists in any human effort to make sense of the God who is at the core of our humanity and sexuality (Foster, 2008). Such an integrated curriculum sees expression in the practice of skills developed in the classroom for addressing the approach to sex and sexuality in the day-to-day ministerial life. Here Foster’s three points on a shared pedagogical commitment (p. 468) provide a sound basis for such an approach.

Human Development

The human growth and development component would build upon the prior education of the individual including formal courses that integrate growth



and development, systemic aspects of human sexuality and psychological components. Various theories of human development related to sexuality would need to be incorporated that emphasize biological and environmental factors as well as the interaction between biological and environmental systems. Highlighted within this component would be an emphasis on relationships and attachment, particularly those of parent-child. Foster (2008) posits that clergy formation is relational in context and so by extension human sexual formation must be offered in a relational context with the aim toward insight in self, other and God, who is the ultimate Other. This is consistent with Pope John Paul II's (1999) writings on priestly formation wherein he discusses "the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood [which] cannot be defined except through this multiple and rich interconnection of relationships" (p. 27).

In addition, and in order to deal with the contemporary issues that attend romantic coupling, information and education related to heterosexual and same-sex relationships along with non-sexual relationships would need to be included as part of the discussion of sexual matters especially as these would impact the priest/counselor/confessor and parishioner relationships. And because this training occurs within the context of the Catholic Church, particularly addressed to religious leadership, it must be integrated with the teachings of the church recognizing the theological perspectives and the

quest for truth. This finds support within the writings of Benedict XVI (2005) who relates that "human sexuality is not juxtaposed to our being as person but part of it. Only when sexuality is integrated within the person does it successfully acquire meaning."

Spirituality

A balanced approach to human sexuality formation necessarily incorporates the spiritual focusing on prayer and the sacramental life with an aim to develop natural and supernatural virtues. Here the development of the internal life through quiet reflection on the word of God and spiritual writings in meditation are essential. In the spiritual context human sexuality formation cannot be divorced from both its incarnational and sacred elements without causing grave problems. As Rohlheiser (1999) relates:

A healthy sexuality is the single most powerful vehicle there is to lead to selflessness and joy, just as an unhealthy sexuality helps constellate selfishness and unhappiness as does nothing else. We will be happy in this life, depending upon whether or not we have a healthy sexuality. One of the fundamental tasks of spirituality, therefore, is to help us understand and channel our sexuality correctly. . . sexuality is such a powerful fire that it is not always easy to channel it in life-giving ways. . . [and] sex,

precisely because it is such a powerful fire, always needs the protection of chastity (pp. 192-202)

A Christian spirituality, then, that incorporates the healthy appropriation of sexuality will be directed at its being dynamic and liberating even while it fosters intimacy, reliance on the other and communion (Dwyer, 1987). This approach to chaste sexuality applies to all states in life.

In addition, opportunities and exposure to beauty as a source of contemplation open up the senses to appreciate both the goodness of the incarnate along with aspects of the supernatural and divine. These aspects can form an integral part of sexual formation in healthy and holy ways when they lead ultimately to truth and love (Dubay, 1999). In so doing beauty inspires as it exposes the priest in tangible form to the essential aspect of who he is.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that sexual health and well-being are an integral part of the ministry and life of clergy and those who aspire to such vocations. This is essential not only so that clergy avoid problems and scandal but more importantly so that they can live fulfilling, happy and holy lives and effectively assist others to do the same. Thus programs that assist clergy in sexual health and responsibility will have some key and essential compo-

nents as described above. Haffner (2001) summarizes many of these in describing sexually healthy religious professionals as people who are: "knowledgeable about human sexuality; familiar with their tradition's sacred texts on sexuality; able to engage in theological reflection about how best to integrate sexuality and spirituality" (p. 14), as well as examine the impact of justice in relation to sexual issues. Further, she relates the importance of training in pastoral counseling especially "when dealing with sexual matters, for individuals, families and groups." One must be able to discuss and preach effectively on sexual issues while recognizing one's own limits and boundaries in dealing with such matters. This will be supported by knowledge about church policies on sexuality including understanding and being able to deal with one's own sexual feelings as they arise in oneself as well as in congregants.

Programs incorporating this model need to be evaluated both in the short-term as well as the long-term. Short-term evaluation would include elements of factual knowledge of sexuality, recognition of the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate relationships and behaviors, advising skills, and consistency with aspects of the *Program for Priestly Formation* (2006). Long-term evaluation would include self-analysis of comfort in working with youth, counseling individuals and couples with sexual problems, dealing with such issues in the confessional, and even recognizing and including aspects of sexuality in religious writing. A critical element in the long-term would also recognize the need to enable ongoing formation of clergy and religious leaders through days of study and reflection, homiletic approaches and retreat opportunities that emerge from ongoing deliberation. Ultimately, it is hoped that such an integrated approach to the understanding and appropriation of sexuality

education and formation will lead to outcomes that not only demonstrate harm reduction but assist clergy in being more balanced, more effective in leading and who are more joyful in their vocations.

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Sexual Abuse and Systemic Dynamics in the Church



The reality of sexual abuse, particularly of minors, by clergy and religious has been present since early in the life of the church. It has mostly been suffered in silence. In the United States, over the last twenty-five years there has been a steady increase in public awareness of the extent of sexual abuse by Catholic churchmen and of the extent of negligence by church authorities in addressing the abuse. Jason Berry's 1985 reporting on the sexual abuse of dozens of young victims by Fr. Gilbert Gauthe in Louisiana and on the widespread cover-up of the abuse by diocesan authorities first brought this issue into public light. Tens of thousands of more cases surfaced in the next fifteen years, culminating in 2002 in massive revelations in the Boston Archdiocese, met with active cover-up by Cardinal Bernard Law, and prompting disclosure of widespread abuse and cover-up in numerous other dioceses. In the last ten years, the tragedy of clerical sexual abuse has been front and center in the life of the U.S. Catholic Church, becoming a profound crisis with repercussions at many levels. Realization of the devastating impact of abuse on the lives

of countless victims and of the widespread mishandling of the crisis by authorities has caused many Catholics to lose faith in their church and leave it; compensations paid to victims have bankrupted numerous dioceses, and church leadership has largely lost moral credibility and voice.

The sexual abuse crisis has also devastated the church in other countries, from disclosures in Ireland of abuse of minors on a vast scale over decades with subsequent resignations of several bishops, to abuse and cover-up by prelates in Belgium, to revelations of widespread abuse by clergy and bishops in Germany, to the less publicized, rampant abuse of countless victims in Latin America, Africa and Asia, where it becomes another heavy layer of the already crushing burden of oppression suffered by the majority of people.

I write with nearly twenty years of experience working internationally with clergy and religious. I started evaluating and treating clergy sex offenders at Saint Luke Institute, then focused on abuse prevention, developing programs for formators and candidates and resources

for leadership. My goals in this article are to identify systemic dynamics in the church that underlie the sexual abuse crisis; to explore the implications of these dynamics for the formation of future ministers; and to offer recommendations, especially for formators.

SYSTEMIC DYNAMICS

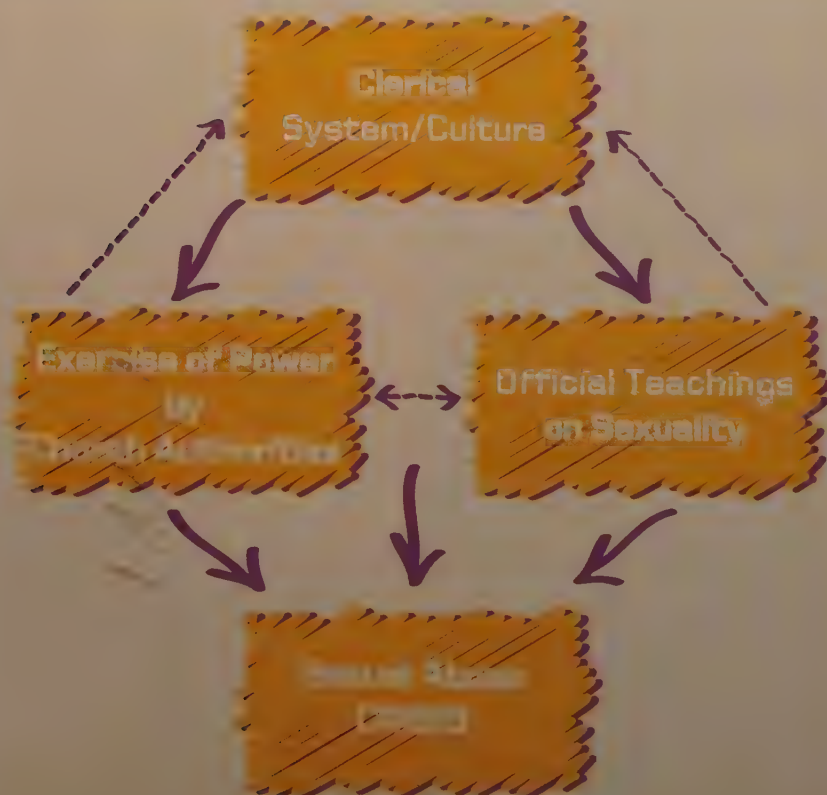
The *crisis* of clergy sexual abuse refers to the fact that the serious pathology of a relatively small number of priests and religious—pathology present throughout society, but usually contained by structures, laws, and social attentiveness so that its damage does not extend too far—has, in the Catholic context, produced a devastating landscape with hundreds of thousands of victims around the world, loss of a church home for countless faithful, and severely damaged the credibility of church leadership. My thesis is that this crisis is the result of the way power has been exercised by church authorities, of official teachings on sexuality, and of the interaction between the two, both of which are shaped by clerical culture and, in turn, reinforce that culture.

EXERCISE OF POWER BY CHURCH AUTHORITIES

Understanding of power. Since the time of Constantine, the church has lived with a court reality that has shaped its understanding of power, especially as wielded by authorities. Central to the power structure of the church is the belief that hierarchical governance with its monarchical style is of divine right. Dowling (2010) notes that, over the centuries, especially during the church's colonial periods, there have been attempts to convert Christ into an imperial God with a license to conquer and triumph over other gods. These influences have shaped the exercise of power in the institutional church, which, in the present restorationist climate, supports a centralized power structure enforcing strict compliance with what is deemed orthodox and considers the exercise of power as principally about retaining control. The hierarchy (with few exceptions) does not typically exercise power as service.

Institutions act consistently to preserve themselves, ensure their own interests, and reinforce their authority. The church is no different. In the context of the sexual abuse crisis of the past twenty-five years, it has acted to protect itself, sacrificing the lives of many children in the process. The institutional understanding and use of power creates tension with other positions held by the church, including condemning institutionalized injustice, defending the dignity of human persons, and recognizing just actions as constitutive of preaching the Gospel. The failure to apply these core values to its own conduct has been profoundly damaging to the credibility of the hierarchy's teaching.

Focus on laws. The primary concern of a hierarchical church is protecting its power and control by making sure its pronouncements and laws are obeyed. The focus on obeying the letter of the law is often at the expense of the spirit of



the law, and tends to promote a mindset unable to perceive and respond to grievous situations as it normally should, since perception itself is altered by focusing on the form of the law. Despite the focus on obedience to law, in cases of abuse and cover-up moral imperatives such as “do not lie,” “do not kill,” and “love your neighbor,” not to mention civil laws against sexual involvement with minors were ignored—by the abusers and, more egregiously, by church authorities.

Accountability. The sense of betrayal and ire of the faithful around clergy sexual abuse has been especially directed toward church authorities, whose failure to protect resulted in much harm and suffering, and who have not yet been held answerable for their actions. This crisis has revealed the extent to which, for the institutional church, power centers on protecting image and control and how severely this conditions taking up accountability. Doyle (2008) observes that, in hierarchical institutions like the church, accountability is primarily upward, to one’s superiors, and the idea of accountability to one’s hierarchical inferiors is easily dismissed, as it would weaken the authority of those in leadership roles and imply that the hierarchical order itself might be of human rather than divine institution. “From a psychological perspective, hierarchical models of accountability by their very nature foster mechanisms of denial.”

Failure of Leadership. Many have wondered why so many church leaders failed, in the context of the sexual abuse crisis, to act as the faithful would have hoped and expected. It was mostly systemic factors which led to inadequate responses, as the crisis broke in country after country. Failure of leadership was driven by the oft-cited fear of scandal rooted in the unspoken fear of loss of power and control which would result from damage to core aspects of the institutional structure. Tragically, the fear of scandal was not driven by concern to

avoid harming children and betraying believers. The defensive, adversarial stance of many leaders toward the faithful (especially victims and those who dare to speak the truth) is one of the most tragic aspects of the failure of leadership in this crisis. It is a failure to lead from within the heart of the flock, to walk with one’s people from the midst of their experience and to discern responses from there. Cozzens (2002) reminds us that the bishops’ responsibility to church unity and order, to their brother bishops, and to the bishop of Rome, is “only enhanced when they confront tendencies to deny or minimize the disturbing and challenging issues of the day.” Rather than leading to division, speaking the truth clearly would actually improve church credibility and strengthen the bonds among all the faithful, who would respond with compassion and justice even toward leadership, but it would diminish the type of power and control typical until now. Many agree that the moral authority of church leadership has never been weaker. We need leadership “that does not presume to have all the answers all the time” and agrees to be held accountable.

OFFICIAL TEACHINGS ON SEXUALITY

From its earliest centuries, Christianity has been a sex-negative religion, influenced by Greek Stoicism and Neoplatonism which considered celibacy the ideal, accepting sexual activity only for procreation and condemning sexual pleasure and all other sexual activities, and by Gnostic asceticism and Manichean dualism which considered body and spirit in opposition. The teaching of the Western church proceeded from these ideals, associating the body with earthly matter and thus with sin, and the spirit with transcendent realities and thus with God. This dissociation of body and spirit brought “an overlay of sinfulness

to almost every aspect of human sexuality,” and continues to be at the core of official belief and teaching about sexuality (Bullough, 1992).

Richards (1997) observes that the dissociation of body and spirit easily leads to a dissociation of belief and behavior. When a church system focuses so exclusively on belief and correct dogma, particularly in the area of sexuality, its members can end up participating in this dissociation. A minister can thus perform his duties while successfully uncoupling his offending behaviors from his religious belief. The system’s dissociation of belief from behavior provides the climate for the psychological/emotional dissociation that contributes to much of the sexual abuse and exploitation in the church.

The Catholic tradition has developed and maintained a highly legalistic sexual ethics. As ethicist Nelson (1992) points out, there is more legalism in the ethics regarding sexuality than regarding any other area of human behavior. This legalism tries to define sexual morality by measuring the form and “physiological contours of certain types of acts” and then tries to restrain and control sexuality. For example, legalism has generally condemned genital sex outside of heterosexual marriage and blessed sex within marriage. This has given moral justification for abusive sex within marriages, “by insisting that the rightness of sex is measured not fundamentally by the quality of relationship, but by its form.” Legalistic understanding of sexuality greatly increases the risk of exploitative and damaging sexual situations in which the other is an object. In this context, we continue to see the contradiction between restrictive church teaching focused on controlling sexual behavior and extensive sexual acting out by church ministers. This highlights the problem with a legalistic approach to sexuality that too often judges behavior—especially of those in

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ministry—only in terms of how well it safeguards form (e.g., no unwanted children resulted, there was no public scandal), while ignoring its relational dimensions.

A church context in which dualism and legalism dominate official teaching on sexuality easily leads to disconnecting offending behaviors from religious belief and practice and to tolerance for sexual violence. As former formator Cozzens (2002) points out, this context creates serious psychological tension for seminarians taught to suspect the value of sexuality and required to renounce sexual expression (despite what they often observe around them), while being expected to be psychosexually and emotionally integrated and mature. Faced with these demands, and often lacking resources required to handle them healthily, many seminarians (and clergy) cope by repressing their sexuality, which is then likely to emerge unexpectedly, and often in problematic ways.

Kennedy (2001) observes that “As long as we continue to pit nature against spirit, we remain a wounded people, a wounded church.” And, adds Cozzens (2002), when church leaders and ministers “fail to understand our common woundedness and look upon nature as something to be subdued, rather than joyfully trusting in the goodness of creation and in God’s abiding presence (without denying, of course, the reality of sin),” they deny the wounds, fail to tend them and risk “compensating for the unnamed pain” through distorted exercise of power and authority. Nonetheless, institutional resistance to change continues making it difficult to revise teachings on sexuality, even when, as Cozzens points out, human experience, supported by theological and pastoral reflection, stands in contrast to them.

The needed “alternative to sexual legalism is not laxity and license,” explains Nelson, but an ethics and teaching centered in healthy relation-

ships, growth and integration. Andolsen (1992) adds that in a revised code of Roman Catholic sexual ethics, “the fundamental evil should not be nonprocreative sexual activity, it should be coercive sexual activity” and harm done to others, finally addressing directly the widespread sin of sexual violence affecting so many and too often met by institutional silence.

CLERICAL CULTURE

By clerical culture or clericalism, I refer to the clerical system—the attitudes, behaviors and institutional dynamics that protect the interests, privileges and power “traditionally conceded to those in the clerical state” (Cozzens, 2002). Clericalism manifests primarily in an “authoritarian style of ministerial leadership, a rigidly hierarchical worldview, and a virtual identification of the holiness and grace of the church with the clerical state and thereby with the cleric himself.” It “blocks honest communication and ultimately leaves the cleric . . . isolated.” Of course, many priests do not identify with or support clericalism. Several characteristics of clerical culture show how it shapes attitudes toward power and sexuality that have contributed to the abuse crisis.

Quasi-feudal. The institutional church is one of the last feudal systems in the world, in which bishops and prelates are princes of the church who answer only to the pope. “If the hierarchy’s royal accretions were simply vestiges of their medieval past, they might be harmless enough. But these episcopal conceits have forged a culture of privilege, secrecy and exemption that is now exposed as a detriment to both their teaching and pastoral roles” (Cozzens, 2010). In an important step forward, since July 2010 the hierarchy are now also subject to the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on matters related to sexual abuse.

Increasingly Cultic. The cultic model of priesthood, increasingly fostered in seminaries and modeled by the hierarchy, emphasizes the priest's sacramental roles, sacredness, and being set apart from the people. It contributes to a mystique of priesthood which places priests on pedestals, denies their essential humanity, and expects little accountability from them.

Centrality of Celibacy. Having celibacy as the central pillar of a closed, all-male system means that, at one level, sexuality goes underground, fostering repression, while at another level, the environment is rife with sexual undercurrents typical of old boy subcultures, both straight and gay. Many consider mandatory celibacy a significant factor in the sexual abuse crisis. I submit that it is not celibacy itself which causes sexual misconduct (many people live healthy, integrated celibate lives). Rather, it is the clerical culture within which mandatory celibacy resides which tolerates, even tacitly encourages, the psychosexual and relational immaturity and lack of integration which can lead to problematic behaviors and can attract individuals seeking a context where they won't have to deal with their own sexuality or where they can actively explore it under cover of a protective environment. In my experience, priests who are healthy celibates were pretty integrated relationally and psychosexually when they entered or have subsequently done integration work and do not overidentify with the closed club of the clerical system.

Unhealthy Ambition. Another aspect of clerical culture is unhealthy ambition to rise through the hierarchical ranks of a system in which, as Cozzens (2002) points out, "neither human sexuality nor human ambition can be discussed . . . honestly," so that "the ambitious priest protests too much that he is neither sexual nor ambitious Repressed ambition, like repressed sexuality, eventually erupts in behaviors

and attitudes that demoralize and scandalize the faithful."

Disloyalty as the Capital Sin. As many have noted, in the closed clerical system the capital sin is disloyalty, making it difficult to openly criticize or question leaders and their decisions. The two bishops (Thomas Gumbleton and Geoffrey Robinson) who were openly critical before 2010 of the institutional response to the abuse crisis were both rebuked by the Vatican. Since 2010, several more bishops have spoken out not just in remorse, but in criticism of the institutional response which led to so much harm. They remain the exceptions. The loyalty expected by the system is about protecting the system itself, especially papal authority. Healthy loyalty would be centered in fidelity to the Gospel and to courageously confronting issues that, if ignored, could really harm the church (Cozzens, 2002).

Promotes Unhealthy Psychology. Clerical culture contributes to unhealthy thinking, including groupthink, insularity, a siege mentality and denial. It can also contribute to unhealthy relational dynamics, and makes it unlikely that problematic areas of sexuality will be effectively addressed.

Interaction of Power and Sexuality in the Context of Clerical Culture. Clinicians Ferder and Heagle (2010) observe with great insight that the collective psychic structure of the institutional church regarding the sexual abuse crisis was similar to that of sex offenders, who typically deny responsibility, minimize seriousness of offenses, blame victims, react with outrage when accused, and believe they are above accountability. This attitude has been typical in the "responses of church officials from the cathedrals of the U.S. to the basilicas of Rome." The interaction of attitudes toward power and sexuality within clerical culture can make it very difficult for individuals to address their problems. An institution with a focus on control,

self-preservation, legalism, a culture of silence and loyalty creates fertile ground for accepting men with problems, as long as they conform to the system.

Having considered the way approaches to power and sexuality in the context of clerical culture have resulted in the crisis of sexual abuse, I come to a central conclusion. Recovery from this crisis and prevention of further crises requires structural changes: it will not happen only with penance and conversion. Bishops have written (and Catholic social doctrine teaches) that injustice is fundamentally a structural issue and that "structural injustices cannot be eradicated by a simple conversion of individuals" (Velasquez, 1986). This core principle has not been consistently applied by the hierarchy of the church to itself in addressing its own tragically flawed response to clerical sexual abuse. Pope Benedict recently said, "The problem of abuse by clergy is solved more by a spirit of penitence and conversion by its members than by a radical change of church structures" (Glatz, 2010). The pope's statement is not surprising, given the institutional dynamics we have considered and the resistance to change they produce. Nonetheless, as critic Bishop Robinson (2008) says, if the church is "ever to look to the future with a clear conscience," it will first need profound change, starting with an exploration of all the factors, including structural ones, contributing to the unhealthiness that allowed the abuse to happen on such a vast scale.

There are efforts within the church to name the need for restructuring and to identify concrete changes that would likely prevent systemic failures like the response to the sexual abuse crisis. These efforts are significant, and, not surprisingly, in many contexts they are dismissed or ignored by the hierarchy. Any structural change in the areas of sexuality and authority would open the way for possibly diminished control and power by the

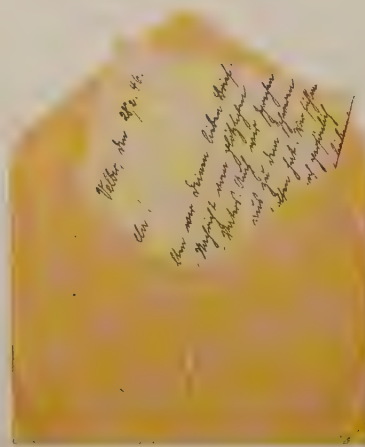
system, including regarding papal authority. In the U.S. every diocese must now establish an advisory board on sexual abuse. Kathleen McChesney, former head of the U.S. bishops' Office of Youth and Child Protection, would like to see advisory boards in dioceses worldwide and at the Vatican, with lay experts advising the hierarchy, including the pope (Miller, 2010). It will be difficult to accomplish this in certain cultures, where church officials hold much social power and women and laity lack voice in church matters. The work necessary to bring about needed reforms and implement adequate accountability structures will require addressing cultural resistances to change—not only in different countries, but also within the church itself.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FORMATION

Prevention programs/workshops/courses during formation are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to significantly reduce or eliminate the risk of sexual misconduct by ministers, as long as formation continues to unfold in the current increasingly clerical culture. Forty years ago a group of priests in Sidney, Australia wrote to the bishop asking for closure of St. Patrick's Seminary in Manly, on grounds it was an environment that "fostered immaturity in the students and paternalism in the staff, a 'hush-hush' attitude to the subject of celibacy', and little of the 'flexibility and toughness needed to cope with the outside environment'" (Crittenden, 2007). The same could be said today about quite a few formation contexts. Although today, in the U.S. and increasingly in other countries, formation for priesthood and ministry includes significant input on healthy sexuality and abuse prevention (and all U.S. dioceses and religious communities must earn certification that their members have received training in abuse prevention), this input is not always effective. Seminarians (and some

formators) conditioned by clericalism and suspicious of psychological perspectives that might challenge their attitudes or shed light on areas of personal struggle tend to adopt dismissive, resistant attitudes when required to participate in prevention programs. I have encountered this in numerous contexts around the world and have listened to tragic stories of harm done among seminarians, by seminarians to others, and by formators to seminarians. I have seen other individuals take full advantage of materials presented and commit to the personal work of healing and integration.

A combination of factors increases the vulnerability of candidates in formation to sexual misconduct:



- Increasingly cultic culture of seminary formation;
- Increasingly hierarchical authority structures and increasing expectation of adherence to forms and behaviors defined by those structures;
- Tension between the official teachings on sexuality and the ideal of celibacy central to clerical culture, and the actual reality of significant sexual activity among candidates, formators, and other priests/religious at all levels;
- Psychological problems, immaturity, lack of psychosexual integration of candidates;
- Psychological rigidity of candidates;
- Increasingly traditional ecclesiology, theology, and spirituality of many

candidates in tension with the press of the world—a particular challenge for the psychologically rigid, and those with limited resources for integrating the different poles of experience;

- Tension between the teachings, expectations and culture of the formation system and the home cultures of candidates (especially regarding sexuality, relations between men and women, and the use of power and authority);
- Lack of understanding of systemic dynamics;
- Fear and anxiety, especially in those for whom much is at stake in successfully completing formation and securing the status and security expected from the ministerial role.

Formators face several particular challenges. First, a scarcity of candidates plus pressure from leadership to promote them can make it difficult to winnow effectively when dealing with psychologically, relationally and academically problematic individuals. Second, formators can be affected by the clerical culture and the need to protect an image of the church. This dynamic is present more in diocesan than in religious settings, though also within religious life one can find a culture intent on protecting image and status quo. Third, most formation now is international, and formators work with candidates from a plurality of other cultures who hold differing world views and hierarchies of values (saving face is paramount in many cultures, and can make it difficult for candidates to speak truthfully about problems and struggles), and are operating under pressure not to fail. Often, these candidates will tend to say and do what is expected, and formators may not know what they are really experiencing and understanding. At other times, candidates desire growth and integration, but may require extended time before they can address their issues openly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of all these dynamics and of the urgent need for ministers whose being and doing will help heal the many wounds caused by this crisis, it is crucial to form candidates for:

1. Consciousness of systemic dynamics, of power and how it is used, of the reality of clerical culture and how they relate to it;

2. Consciousness of how the exercise of power significantly caused the sexual abuse crisis;

3. Awareness of the discrepancy between official teachings on sexuality and behavioral realities among ministers and the reasons for the discrepancy;

4. A healthy approach to and exercise of power, grounded in an understanding of power as relational, and intended for service. This means asking whether and when it is possible to exercise power relationally within the institutional system;

5. Robust psychosexual integration, and a solid understanding of celibate commitment and of resources personally available for living it healthily;

6. Awareness of their own vulnerabilities in regard to the power system—how likely they are to be used by the system or to use it;

7. Awareness of their own leadership style and areas needing development and training so they can become pastoral, relational ministers.

Of course, these recommendations raise considerable implications for the whole enterprise of formation within the context of today's church reality. The basic questions formators and leaders need to consider deeply are: Who is being formed? And for what purpose? Are candidates being formed primarily to maintain the system as it is, or are they being formed primarily as ministers of a Gospel that compels them to compassionately challenge injustice and oppression, even when it happens in

their own home? My hope is for ministers capable of courageous, compassionate dialogue and action in service of the healing, reconciliation and transformation necessary in our church.

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Woman

AND man, Ann Garrido together



I began with my essay with seven seemingly simple questions in mind: What are the gifts and challenges of men and women working collaboratively in ministry? And what role does sexuality play in the equation? I say "seemingly" because, of course, they turned out to be anything but "simple." Indeed questions involving gender and sexuality, as evidenced by the other essays in this issue, are inevitably among the most complex we can ask. While we use the vocabulary of "male" and "female," "sex" and "sexuality" liberally in our every day speech, when pressed on what we mean by these terms, we have a hard time pointing any descriptor in them.

Recognizing the immense debate involved in merely defining the terms and wishing to remain more narrowly focused on the theme of shared ministry, I want to acknowledge upfront two conclusions I reached early in the research that admitted the basic direction this essay will take. The first conclusion is that we have yet to arrive at a common understanding of sexuality and its relationship to the other energies we name that shape our lives and, indeed, the world at large. From our study of science, we must recognize that the laws governing our universe appear structured to support interdependence, relationships and a flourishing of life. Human sexuality, without a doubt, participates in the energy that animates all that exists. It is an energy that compels us beyond ourselves and into relationships with others that become generative, sometimes physically generative in the birth of a child, but often not. Reproduction in no way exhausts the myriad ways human relationships can be generative. Previously we have narrowed the discussion of sexuality between on the path from physical attraction to sexual intercourse. Now the conversation has broadened to every sphere in which sexuality is the framework in which to understand all human relationships, including romantic marriage and romantic unions, but Catholic priestly and friendship as well. It is helpful to make distinction between romantic attraction and the attraction of friendship to the extent that it is all one conversation. Perhaps in the words of Frederick Buechner: "The first stage was believe

that there is only one kind of love. The second stage is to believe that there are many kinds of love and that the English had a different word for each. The last stage was to believe that there was only one kind of love."

In the end, we cannot expect more clarity than the subject matter itself provides. Hence, when exploring this topic, we need to be comfortable with some ambiguity regarding the nature of our attractions, comfortable with words meaning different things to different people, comfortable with conflicting opinions (even within our own heads), comfortable with immersion and not knowing.

The second conclusion follows the first. Because of the ambiguous nature of conversation about sexuality, it is less helpful to ask ministers, "What are the gifts and challenges of men and women working collaboratively?" than "Can you tell me about one relationship that you have had working with a minister of the opposite sex that meant a lot to you?" Stories of a man and a woman in ministry are admittedly anecdotal and we must be hesitant about drawing broad conclusions from them. At the same time, they are deep and rich and real. Sometimes it is in the particulars that we finally truly grasp theories and/or address.

In light of these conclusions, I decided that perhaps the most fruitful way to approach this essay was to interview six Catholic ministers—men and women, lay and ordained, heterosexual and homosexual, married and vowed religious—about the particularities of their experience working alongside a minister of the opposite sex in ministry. Ranging in age from early thirties to mid-seventies, each of these ministers had minimally fifteen years professional ministerial experience. From the perspective of ministry work in the light of ministry formation, I would consider each to possess a healthy maturity, integrated sexuality, as described by other authors in this issue. I asked the ministers to reflect on the gifts and challenges they had encountered in a specific relationship and why they had entered that collaboration, as well as the questions they had discovered along the way to help them judge when the relationship was a fruitful one, in service of their

I find ministry to be drenched with epiphanies.

ministerial aims, and when it was in danger of heading in less fruitful directions? How do they live in the in-between places?

THE GIFTS

Women and men in ministry readily acknowledge they enjoy working with the opposite sex, though for varying reasons, some of which they find difficult to peg. Ministers tend to name the gift in terms of discovering a certain complementarity in the gifts the other brings to ministry that work well alongside their own.

- "When I've worked with a woman, I've often found that a balance-thing happens. She has a different way of seeing things, sometimes has insights into things I don't have."
- "For me there has always been an excitement to working with a woman. I like to experience her gifts and see how they play up against my gifts. I get excited about the synergy that could happen."

At the same time, they hesitated to attribute the particular gifts that the person brought to their gender.

- "He pretty much thinks what he thinks and does not waver. I have found it a gift to count on the fact that he's not going to read into stuff. Is that a guy thing? I don't know. Maybe it's just him."
- "(She) saw a population in the parish that was not being served and had a vision for beginning a ministry for them. She had lots of vision. Prophetic vision. I brought the networking and organizing skills. I was the shell to her yolk. I think it worked well because it was a gifts-based model, not because our roles were pre-determined by gender."

One minister who is gay noted a special compatibility and empathy in working with women that had been a gift to him:

- "Gay men and women often share a common bond because we both know what it is like to be marginalized and invisible. Like many women I've worked with, I find ministry to be drenched with epiphanies. Since our experiences have historically been dismissed, we don't have to kowtow to the ordinary ways of interpreting things

and can be amazed with one another. I find I am able to share very intimate conversations and strong affective feelings with women without the erotic undertow."

Heterosexual ministers, too, emphasized that there was much shared in common with ministers of the opposite sex—similar points of view, similar passions. Indeed common theological questions, experiences of church life, and concerns in ministry were consistently the foundation for the relationship. Yet, the differences between them as female and male brought a dimension of curiosity and tension into the relationship that kept it interesting.

- "There was a blessing in that there was enough difference in how we looked at the world that we'd developed different bodies of information and experience, enabling us to reach a wide populace when we spoke together. There was the right amount of attraction between us that it was energizing to be with that person. The difference kept us alert. There was a spark or energy to it."

Working with members of the opposite sex brought out a side of themselves that working with members of the same sex did not. It drew out aspects of their personality that they might not otherwise have known about or developed, helping them to become more fully themselves.

- "The best way I can explain it is like this: I was in the gift shop the other day where there was a set of chimes that someone was testing. It had some higher pitched notes, but then also these low, deep resonances and when all struck together, it created this remarkably beautiful harmony. I liked all of the chimes, but if someone asked me which one I wanted, it would be that one. It just struck a beautiful chord. That is how I've felt about working with a man. Women can make beautiful harmonies together, too, but there is something about working with a man that evokes a range of notes not evoked by working with a woman."

THE CHALLENGES

While the ministers found it difficult to pinpoint gifts specifically affiliated with the opposite sex, they

found it easier to name ways in which gender had directly contributed to a collaborative challenge. Several struggled to clarify that it was not necessarily the other person's maleness or femaleness that presented the problem, but that each of us live out our maleness or femaleness within cultural contexts that give us strong messages about how we are expected to act as a man or woman, what is appropriate as a man or woman.

- "I am a straightforward and direct person—let's say it, get it out on the table, and be done with it. Many of the women that I've worked with have been socialized toward skirting around the bush. This has been problematic in my relationships with women in a way that it has not been problematic in my relationships with men. It has been hard to figure out when to speak and when to be quiet and how forgiveness works."

The fact that, in ministry, we also interact within an established ecclesial context adds an additional layer of complication. Within the Catholic Church it is often difficult to disentangle questions of gender from questions of power since many of the male/female ministerial partnerships are simultaneously ordained/lay partnerships.

- "It's hard to know whether the tension that grew between us was due to the fact that I was a woman and he was a man, or whether it was because he had the power and authority in the relationship and I did not. I suspect that it was 90% about power, but it is hard to separate those two out."

- "In my previous pastorate, I worked with a sister who perhaps had been previously hurt badly by a male. No matter what I did, she found me threatening. I read all this stuff on conflict and none of it seemed to help. Finally, I hit the wall and yelled, 'I am not your past. I am not the one that you have the issue with!'"

The most experienced ministers sometimes expressed weariness that after so many years of attempting to bridge the differences between men and women in ministry, it still required so much effort and attention. What once had seemed exciting and possible had turned out to be a long, arduous journey:

- "When I began preaching the gospel of collaboration I did a great deal of research on gender differences in relationships and communication, and many of my presentations were geared to helping women and men understand one another better. I talked a lot about how we are socialized into gender roles—men marked by autonomy and self-reliance; women into attachment and connection. I talked about issues of intimacy and empathy and power, about patriarchy and authority, and how we were being called to move from clericalism and sexism to equality, mutuality, and interdependence. Thirty years later I think we have all been run through that car wash many times over now, and we know that the transformation of relationship and gender roles is a lifelong project for each of us within the context of an ongoing cultural and ecclesial earthquake."

Key to persevering in the ongoing effort to collaborate, as suggested above, is some attraction toward the other. Attraction creates a spark that continues to fuel the engine of the relationship and keep it running. But it can be difficult to find the right amount of spark. The ministers acknowledged that too little attraction or too much attraction provokes difficulties.

- "I am thinking of a man I've had a very difficult time collaborating with who happens to be gay. I don't think that explains the problems we've had, but I do wonder sometimes if there is just so little attraction between us that we aren't interested enough in each other to work it through."

- "Men and women who study and work alongside each other are at risk of entering a seductive and intimate world in which it can be hard to uphold professional boundaries. Without being consciously aware what was happening, I suddenly discovered my body was seeking communion with a man with whom I shared an intimate—but to that point, I thought, innocent—friendship. It was as if my body naturally followed the movement of my heart in a way that I never could have predicted."

- "The uneasiness lies in working side by side in ministry with its necessary daily adventures into the sacred.

This type of work constantly calls for working through matters of the heart and soul, and can make it difficult for men and women to maintain friendships that do not delve into the erotic."

"GREEN LIGHTS"

Ministers enjoyed talking about collaborations with the opposite sex in ministry that went well—where the gifts each brought fit like puzzle pieces and the degree of attraction felt in balance. It readily became clear that these relationships were life-giving for the partners in the relationship, but more so, for the communities they served. It was this latter point that often helped ministers determine the health and appropriateness of the relationship.

- "I know I am in the 'green zone' when I feel an energy between me and the other but it is focused outward toward the work."

- "We work well together. We spend time together and enjoy it. We've got common interests and, through our relationship, those interests are moving forward."

While recognizing the need for healthy boundaries in the relationship, the ministers were hesitant to prescribe strong, rigid ones. They felt comfortable interacting outside the professional environment—even encouraged it—so long as the relationship remained public and inclusive.

- "Once we were going to go out to the symphony with each other. The sister I lived with became nervous about this and said I was going out on a 'date.' In her culture of origin, they did not have a history of seeing men and women—much less priests and religious women—as potential friends. But here, we have found ways to make it work. A 'green light' for me is when it remains a public relationship—not one that I am hiding from my community. And, it is not exclusive—it is always open to others joining as well. While we sometimes do go places alone, we aren't consciously trying to create occasions to be alone."

- "Working on a retreat team together is inevitably an intense experience. It involves eating together, praying

together, as well as working together. There is a strong social dimension to the experience that I think enhances the collaboration rather than detracts from it. I don't think we need to avoid socializing with our colleagues. I want people to see us as a team, not just employees who happen to be working at the same place. But one of the guidelines I give myself for example, if the woman is married-I try to get to know her husband and kids as well."

"RED LIGHTS"

At the same time, the ministers had learned to watch for signs in themselves that indicated the relationship was headed in a direction not consonant with their ultimate goals in life, signs that it was time to stop and reflect. Often a shift in focus was the first indicator:

- "I know I'm in the red zone when the energy is beginning to focus too much on the other and the focus on the ministry is lost."

Increasing intensity of attraction was a commonly named indicator, though frequently manifesting itself in indirect ways.

- "I need to be attentive when I find myself dressing up, paying attention to my looks in a particular way when I know we are going to be together."
- "If I chose not to move to another ministry because of the relationship, or if I chose not to live in community so that this other person could visit, or if I started missing community events in order to prioritize a

meeting with this person, I'd know I was in a dangerous place."

- "When I am hesitant to tell my husband who I am meeting with. When I am sharing things with my ministerial colleague that I'm not sharing with him. When the best of myself, my laughter, my sense of humor is going to another. These times I've had to pause and ask myself, 'What exactly is going on here?'"
- "I once received an expensive gift from a colleague. I didn't pick up the signal at the time, but later on it became clear: there was more going on here than I was aware of."

Persistent or disproportionate anger can be another indicator that the collaboration is heading in the wrong direction. Not surprisingly, the attraction and anger are sometimes linked to one another, but in ways that can be experienced as confusing.

- "He's inclined to listen to men in a way that he just won't listen to me. He tries real hard to be respectful, but he's caught in a gender stereotype he's not even aware of. I keep asking myself over and over again, 'If I were a man in that position, would I be treated differently?'"
- "There are times when I can tell I've said or done something wrong and I don't even know what it is and now I'm in the dog house. At times the ratio between the grief and the joy of being together is weighted toward the grief, and I say to myself, 'It is not worth it.'"
- "When desires aren't worked through, nastiness can erupt—the relationship can become competitive, hurtful. We

get into joking that is no longer joking. A sign to me that I have unprocessed desires is that I get mad about things I shouldn't even get mad about. I begin to get hurt and I don't know why."

LIVING IN "YELLOW LIGHT" PLACES

Of course, in the field of ministry—as everywhere in life—relationships are not always neat and tidy. The ministers acknowledged significant collaborations which vacillate between "green" and "red," or—more frequently—linger in a "yellow" zone where the ministers feel they are continuing to learn and grow in positive ways, but where they recognize the need to be particularly attentive.

At the core of Christian belief, we find the doctrine of the Trinity—another way of saying that God in God's very being is relationship. Acknowledging that our universe was created out of the overflow of Trinitarian love and "genetically" imprinted with a Trinitarian pattern, we can see that every loving relationship has communion as its end: the partners want to be with each other, want to be closer to one another, even want to "be one" with each other. And, at the same time, in order for the relationship to continue to exist, the relationship cannot collapse in upon itself. There must be an "other" to love. There must be individuation. In her article on the friendship of men and women, Caroline Simon notes that every male/female relationship is a seesaw between communion and individuation, but, on this side of eternity, the fulcrum is



never perfectly positioned in the middle. Romantic relationships tilt toward communion; relationships that intend to remain chaste tilt toward individuation. Without using theological language, several of the ministers seemed to intuit ways of negotiating the “seesaw,” keeping the tension in the relationship alive but healthy and God-oriented.

- “As one who is always searching to love more deeply, I believe that men and women can gain tremendous insight into the cross by loving chastely friends of the opposite sex while at the same time upholding vows of fidelity to our husbands and wives, but it requires constant reflection.”
- “When he decided to change jobs, I was sad. Part of me wanted him to stay, but the other part of me wanted him to be free to reach his fullest potential even if that was elsewhere. I knew that the right thing to do was to lean toward freedom and wish him well.”
- “We enjoy when we are together, but most important is that each of us lives our individual vocations—our primary life commitments—fully.”

Being happy with one’s “primary life commitment” in marriage, the diocesan presbyterate, religious community, or otherwise is a great aid toward living collaborative relationships in ministry well. Indeed, many find that it is the vows they have taken that give them the freedom to enter fruitfully into new relationships.

- “I would say the fact that I am happily married and that (he) is a committed celibate has slowly decreased my fear that the relationship will go awry. Yes, I have to be careful to pull back at times; to give only my husband my deepest thoughts and save the best for him, but that has gotten easier because it feels most appropriate to tend my heart with (my husband), and enjoy the gift of (my colleague) at work for what it is.”
- “Vowed celibacy makes it much easier for me to collaborate with women to the extent that I see my vows as a gift, a freedom. My vows allow my interactions with women to be understood as non-threatening sexually. I feel I can be more intimate, more vulnerable than I could be if I were not vowed.”

- “It helps not just that I’m vowed, but that I’m happily vowed and happily a member of my community and happy with the life that I’ve chosen. It is working for me. So, I don’t need to get something from this relationship that would be inappropriate—things that one would want from a lover. My needs for intimacy and affirmation are met through my community and my prayer life with God. That frees me for healthy relationships with women.”

Possessing a realistic picture of oneself and confidence in the goodness of God also helps ministers to live with the awkwardness of the “yellow” zone. Prudence allows them to make sound judgments in uncertain situations, good communication skills help them to talk it through, and forgiveness helps them to shift directions when they realize they’ve made a mistake.

- “Through spiritual direction, I’ve come to realize that I have often extended far too much emotional energy—both anger and affection—toward relationships in the workplace. I don’t regret throwing myself into ministry with gusto; I’ve learned a lot. But one of the things I’ve learned is that I don’t have to be the victim of my emotions. I get to choose what I want to do with them.”
- “Sexual desire, like anger or sadness or any other feeling, belongs to me. It is an indicator to say, ‘Hey, look, all my parts are working. Now let’s think about what these parts are working for.’ It is a mistake to think that if I feel something I have to act on it. Lots of people never learn that they don’t have to be ruled by feelings. But it is possible.”
- “Sometimes I meet those who want to return to the idea of ‘I shouldn’t put myself in a place of temptation.’ Well, there is some wisdom to that, but if I fear others and see them as a possible temptation, that really decreases the potential for collaboration! Plus, in the Catholic tradition, if you happen to fall, it doesn’t mean you have to stay fallen. There are ways to get yourself out of the situation!”

In the end, all agreed that the benefits of working collaboratively with the opposite sex in ministry far outweigh the

frustrations and the risks. Acknowledging the life-long effort—indeed, conversion—that such collaboration requires, none of those interviewed expressed any interest in abandoning the challenge.

- “I can’t imagine not working along side my brothers in ministry. I don’t even want to imagine it. Their wisdom, perspective, humor, concrete acts of kindness, the intellectual stimulation of their conversation—why would I want to be in ministry without that?”
- “Just the other evening as I was walking in the woods, I found myself desiring to find that ancient quarry from which God carved marble, alabaster and the dust from stars into the glorious forms of my sisters in ministry. I thought perhaps if some stone chips remained scattered among the leaves their patterns might teach me something about compassion, wonder, and the unlimited capacity toward ‘agape love’ which is surely the potential of all our human hearts. I went home without having found this quarry, but with a heart filled with gratitude for my sisters and all they continue to teach me. May we continue to pray for each other and allow ourselves to live in the tension which is our spiritual journey.”

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EMPATHIC LOVE: QUALITY OF SEXUALITY

Deborah L. Sheehan

The stillness was deafening. I had just heard myself say words I had not planned. True and honest words, but apparently, challenging. I had been invited to be part of a panel on the topic of sexuality. Educators, students, parents and professionals gathered for three days to consider the topic, "The Contemporary Adolescent Male." Our input would inform a process being conducted by an all male Catholic high school in order to better design future curricula and programs.

With prayerful reflection, my words came effortlessly but with intensity. I spoke of the need to help young people be formed in a positive, respectful understanding of sexuality which would generate a deep capacity for loving relationships with appropriate boundaries. Even I was surprised, when I heard myself say, "And we need to remember God created sexuality and God created the orgasm." The silence spoke volumes. It was only later that some participants individually thanked me. One breakout group noted they would have said—and truly believed—that God created sexuality and the orgasm. But they also realized their discomfort was a clear sign of doubt.

The tension they experienced points to a lack of congruence in the understanding of sexuality. They discovered that intellectually they believed one thing, but deep within something else. My experience demonstrates that most are very uncomfortable talking, or even thinking, about sexuality as something good, much less holy. To recognize this tension within oneself can, if engaged, be a place of grace—a place of spiritual growth. I know this tension. I remember being tongue-tied over words like penis and vagina when teaching my children the names of body parts. My discomfort had nothing to do with the beauty of my children's bodies and their innocent wholeness. It had to do with me.

How could I insult God by not acknowledging all parts of my child's body—the body designed by God. To name something gives it meaning and dignity, communicating value and worth. How does my ability (or

inability) to name body parts affect my child's self-perception? How might this affect adolescent conduct and adult relationships? And, importantly, if I find it so challenging to use the real names for genitalia with a toddler, what will I do when it comes to explaining sexuality? What would my child need to understand about that? What is this tension about in me?

In this article, I want to make a case for the imperative need to develop a congruent, positive vision of sexuality and spirituality that is faithful to the enduring values of the gospel, informed by contemporary science, and grounded in human experience. Some will argue that such a vision already exists but is not widely understood. Others will point out that the last forty years have been a tumultuous time in which polarized opinions have led to silence in the church on sexual issues. Still others can demonstrate a growing lack of adherence to sexual norms that once were widely embraced. Most people report hearing more about what they should not do from their church. The focus of such guidance has largely been on sexual behavior with an underlying sense of controlling an unruly force that must be tolerated and contained. There has been little to help people connect their desire for God with their desire for connectedness with each other. Few understand sexuality as a potentially powerful energy to bless and connect.

ENERGY TO CONNECT

When asked about what sexuality means, many speak of children, love, relationships, marriage, etc. A few name the sense of awe that can come with deep intimacy. Many are hungry for a positive message about sexuality and spirituality that makes sense to them.

We find it very challenging to convey what most of us say we believe. We have great difficulty looking with God at creation and saying, "This is good." There is even greater difficulty looking with God at humanity, including human sexuality and saying, "This is very good." We discover within ourselves attitudes that betray another understanding—a sense of sexuality as shameful, dark, dangerous, and certainly not holy. We tell stories like the man who remembers, "I was basically taught

that sex is a bad nasty thing, so save it for someone you love. I did, but when I got married I felt like I was defiling my wife to have sex with her." Another told of instruction in his Catholic high school in the 1950s. He was taught that sex was, first, for procreation and, secondly, as the remedy for concupiscence—a word that sent high school students scurrying to the dictionary. Happily this man came to a more loving understanding. A woman recounts that, in her senior year, she and other girls were taken aside by the priest who told them that sex was for having babies and, while it might be unpleasant, they were obliged to do it—"Just think about something else while it is happening."

From one generation to the next, such attitudes impact the understanding of people in ways that affect their relationships. Most adults say they had few if any meaningful conversations about sexuality with their parents, teachers or religious leaders. Much of what was and continues to be communicated is directed at controlling sexual behavior. Little is offered that helps us appreciate and understand the deeper significance of sexuality and its relationship to spirituality.

THE BODY AND SOUL DIVIDED

In Western civilization, Christianity has played an enormous role in shaping dominant cultural attitudes regarding sexuality. Early Christian communities developed a variety of views about sexuality that grew out of their beliefs about themselves, God, and creation. In interpreting the creation story, Ambrose and Jerome, as well as Gregory of Nyssa, shared the understanding that "marriage, intercourse, and Paradise were as incompatible . . . as were Paradise and death. . . . Society, marriage, and, if not those, certainly sexual intercourse, were fundamentally alien to the original definition of humanity" (Brown, p. 399).

Writing in the early fifth century, Augustine held a different view. For him, Adam and Eve had the same bodies and sexual characteristics that we do, including the begetting and nurturing of children. "In Adam and Eve's first state, sexual desire was not absent, but it coincided perfectly with the conscious

will: it would have introduced no disruptive element into the clear serenity of their marriage" (Brown, p. 402). Adam and Eve would have had full control of their sexual responses with no sense of the unruly lust that Augustine found so problematic. He saw marriage and virginity as two successive forms of Christian life with virginity as superior. "While continence is of greater value, it is not sin to render the conjugal debt, but to exact it beyond the need for generation is a venial sin" (Clark, p. 48). He, along with other early writers, found no place for sexual pleasure as beneficial to the relationship of husband and wife. Augustine did much to insure that marriage was a more acceptable (though lesser) path for Christians, naming three goods of marriage: children, fidelity of the spouses, and sacramental bond; however his understanding of concupiscence meant that all of humanity was forever tainted, having been conceived in lust.

Not all Christian writers and thinkers held such pessimistic views. Julian, Cassian and other writers of the time disputed Augustine's claims about concupiscence and the binding of the will (Brown, pp. 409, 420). The interested reader can find a fuller discussion in *Body and Society* by Peter Brown. One of the more enduring legacies of this period is that by the fifth century sexual renunciation was associated with holiness in virtually all Christian communities. Marriage and the birth of children were valued, but those who married were often regarded as lacking the virtue necessary to remain continent. Sexual desire was suspect, even in marriage.

Much of the popular understanding of the Christian message about sexuality throughout the centuries included a sense of the incompatibility of sexuality and holiness. While Christians continued to uphold the goodness of the created order and the sanctity of life, the perceived dualism of body and soul, the emphasis on a future life of genderless bliss and sense of shame associated with sexuality tended to separate it from the path of holiness. Most saints were virgins. If married, they usually had eventually agreed to be continent. Clergy were increasingly required to forego marriage, with celibacy mandated for all priests at the Second Lateran Council in 1139. Only in

marriage was sexuality seen as a good for the birth of children, a necessity for the community. Increasingly, sexuality was linked with immorality, lust and defilement.

INCARNATE LOVE

Doubtless throughout the centuries, some Christians came, through their own graced experiences, to a sense of sexuality as good, but often this insight was not passed on explicitly. Perhaps it is time to lift up a vision that helps us understand that sexuality holds the potential to incarnate love. The heart of the good news of the gospel is that God became human in Jesus Christ and that we are to make incarnate God's love within our human attempts to love. All human loving is mediated by our embodied experience. Every act of love extended to another—to spouse, child, mother, father, friend, co-worker—is expressed through the body. "Sexuality in its broadest sense covers our whole experience of embodiment. Affective sexuality involves a huge area of feeling and emotions that move us toward other people" (Sheldrake, p. 75). This energy of sexuality moves us beyond ourselves and into relationship, intimacy and service. This energy incarnates our love, moving it from good intention to enfleshed reality. And where there is love, there is God. "God is love and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

Recognizing sexuality as integral to God's original creation moves us to deeper reflection about its dignity and purpose. Ronald Rolheiser puts it this way: "Sexuality is a beautiful, good, extremely powerful sacred energy, given to us by God and experienced in every cell of our being as an irrepressible urge to overcome our incompleteness, to move toward unity and consummation with that which is beyond us" (Rolheiser, p. 196). Appreciating sexuality as a force for building the reign of God in the world brings us quickly to questions about how this energy is to be used for love. What might help move us toward a more whole and holy understanding of sexuality?

We live in a world that has lots of problems with sex. Highly sexualized media invades our consciousness. Marriage rates are declining. Addiction

to pornography is rising exponentially. Sexually transmitted diseases are at epidemic levels. Without some experience of the graced dimension of sexuality, it becomes a dark force. What current understandings in our time can help us to live this powerful energy in respectful and loving ways?

NEW INSIGHTS FROM SCIENCE

While religious and philosophical perspectives have largely influenced the historical understanding of sexuality, science has always played a role in informing those perspectives. In the last sixty years, much study of sexuality in the sciences has made new insights available. For example, when there is injury to parts of the brain that process emotion, the capacity to make decisions and to think rationally is impaired. Patients who suffer trauma or disease to these parts of the brain often experience radical changes in their lives when they no longer have full use of their decision-making processes. The interconnectedness of feeling and thinking is becoming clear. The traditional language of spirituality that often spoke of the human person in terms of mind, body, spirit (or body and soul) and divided those into separate functions turns out to be less than useful today in conceptualizing the human person. Antonio Damasio recognizes the interconnectedness and dignity of the human person. "The truly embodied mind I envision . . . does not relinquish its most refined levels of operation, those constituting its soul and spirit . . . It is just that the soul and spirit, with all their dignity and human scale, are now complex and unique states of an organism" (Damasio, p. 252). Beginning to conceptualize ourselves holistically demands a shift in how we understand body, feelings, thinking, consciousness, soul, etc. New ways of realizing our interconnectedness within our own bodies and with others become a possibility.

In terms of sexuality, this indicates that a broader understanding of sexuality is called for which is reflective of the whole person. One's sexuality becomes an expression of will, emotion, desire—a movement of the whole person toward connectedness with life. It can no longer be said that it resides

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in the “body” as if the body is a discreet and separate entity that threatens the life of the soul. Rather one’s unique personhood and relationship to others and to God is expressed through one’s sexuality. The understanding that emotions and feelings are suspect, even threatening, to reason, now gives way to new questions about how human beings encounter reality with both thinking and feeling.

Emerging brain research studying the complex physiology of sexual interaction suggests that regular sexual activity plays a role in relationships, health and longevity. Neuroscientists tell us that, of all the organs, the brain actually has the most influence with regard to love and sex. Hormone levels in the brain rise and fall influencing human bonding, closeness and trust. For example, studies suggest that oxytocin, released by the pituitary gland in both males and females, plays a role in forming close social bonds as well as increasing feelings of trust. It sensitizes the skin and levels of this hormone continue to rise with subsequent touch, peaking at orgasm. In men, levels of oxytocin are lower than in females, but rise more than 500% at orgasm (Amens, p. 65). This same hormone is present at childbirth and during breast-feeding, facilitating the bonding of mother and child. It is also associated with a kind of amnesic effect that allows a mother to forget the pains of childbirth and lovers to forget

the more negative aspects of each other for a time. This is only one of several hormones that influence, and facilitate, human loving.

Today, science is helping us understand the complex mechanisms that reveal the interconnectedness of our behaviors, our desires, our relationships, and our bodies. As we interact with others, observable mechanisms respond within us. There is indeed a physical reality to loving another that is in the very cells of our bodies. It seems that human persons were designed by the Creator with mechanisms that serve our connectedness for care and nurture. We must remember that God did create the orgasm. And it appears to have more functions than we ever realized.

THE VIRTUE OF DESIRE

As interesting as the neuroscience may be, it is only one lens through which to ponder human loving. Another is the role of desire. Often desire is perceived as a longing for what I do not have. However, Benedictine monk Sebastian Moore believes that we do not desire from emptiness, but rather from fullness. Each person was desired into being by God and that “being desired to be” remains with us. “All desiring is the attempt to be happy, the attempt of an original happiness to extend into the particulars of life” (Moore, p. 15). When there is

an attraction to another’s goodness and beauty, one’s own desirability expands. When the other person responds, there is an affirmation of mutual desirability. Each sees the beauty and goodness—the desirability—of the other and the two participate in a mystery of mutually expanding desirability. This intimacy is not just a romantic notion available with only one other. Nor is actual genital behavior necessarily involved, although it might be. Rather, Moore envisions this as a skill, even a virtue that can be developed. As one grows in the capacity for mature self-awareness and attentiveness to others, deep bonds happen between people that begin to be experienced as God in their midst (Moore, p. 24).

What Moore describes resonates with the experience of those who have known such relationships. Whether between close friends, siblings, parent and child, companions in ministry or spouses, intimacy that is good for both people and results in mutual flourishing spills over to enhance the entire community. When there is also physical intimacy, two people are naked before each other in the mystery and awe of receiving each other as persons created in the image and likeness of God. Each of them is uniquely beautiful, desired by God into being. When that beauty and goodness is received mutually in delight, something more begins to be experienced, a mystery beyond the two people. Over time,

he shared love moves out beyond them, perhaps physically as a child, but also in other ways. Each of them is changed, healed, empowered and blessed. All that they are and who they become is impacted by the love they share. Such loving begets the freedom to love others, to extend oneself in generosity and sacrifice. The community around them is blessed by their presence. The outward flow of love becomes contagious.

Loving and being loved brings with it an affirmation of one's goodness and the goodness of the other. The mutual respect and the willingness to commit oneself to another expands the sense of dignity and value for both persons. Long-time married couples have experienced this dynamic. Loving and being loved with physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy often heals the wounds of early life. Both find in the other a mystery and a home that moves toward wholeness. Each grows in appreciation of personal worth, which fosters self-confidence and enables them to love, bless, and heal the wider world.

God forever associated human sexuality with new human life. Those who have lived together in ever-deepening love know that their shared intimacy, including their sexuality, enables them to love. They know real love—not just the abstract idea—but the real, messy, demanding reality that comes with intimacy. They are able to sacrifice, sometimes without naming it as such. Some sense the transcendent quality of their relationships as having something to do with God. Those who experience the integration of sexuality with spirituality know that the search for the divine Beloved is facilitated by loving, intimate human relationships.

For all people, single, celibate, married, whether heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transgendered, the desire to be desired by one we desire is a given. Whether or not there is genital sexual activity, there is always a longing to see in the eyes of another the recognition of one's own goodness and beauty, to know that another values my being and it is good. Importantly, this desire springs from our own desirability that is our birthright from our Creator. We hold within us, often at an unconscious level, this longing that can be denied, buried, or repressed but is always there. Moore says this longing is "that in me which seeks God" (Moore, p. 14).

To acknowledge this desiring and to risk revealing it to another is to risk intimacy. The vulnerability that accompanies such openness can, if met with love, delight, and acceptance, be a grace-filled opportunity. To experience another knowing me—both the gifted me and the wounded me—and responding with love leads to authentic freedom. Habitual defenses or walls built to protect the self can be let down. In the safety of a healthy close relationship, I can admit what I have done wrong, what I regret, how I am gifted, where I am called to grow. One is able to be honest with self and others. Additionally, healthy intimate relationships teach acceptance. The other person is close but remains a mystery. Opening oneself to another who is different from me, being received in love, and loving, teaches me how to receive otherness. I become more able to be in relationships with a wider array of others different from me.

Prior wounds to the heart and body may limit the ability to respond to another or to God in open vulnerability. Many have been badly wounded by another's sexuality. Rates of sexual abuse tell us that 1 in 6 men and 1 in 4 women have been abused sexually. Others know the pain of sexual choices they regret. As powerfully as healthy sexual energy bonds and graces a relationship, manipulative, abusive sexuality wounds deeply. Casual sex, devoid of deeper meaning, can lead to a hardening of the self. Physical intimacy too soon opens one's fragile, precious self to another who may or may not be able or willing to offer the kind of holding in love that is desired. Sadly, this has been the experience of many.

The social norms, taboos, and law that guided previous generations are often regarded as old-fashioned and unnecessary. The anything-goes mentality of today leaves many confused about sexuality and can be a threat to future health, physically, mentally and spiritually. Some are naïve about the power of sexuality, and any mention of boundaries or limitations strikes them as repressive.

CONCLUSION

A congruent, positive vision of sexuality and spirituality acknowledges all of the above realities. It takes

seriously creation as God's intention. It recognizes that through human loving, in all its many forms, God's love becomes incarnate. It understands sexuality as a powerful energy in need of boundaries to be channeled for blessing. Sexual energy becomes not a force to be hidden in darkness and shame but a holy power to be shaped by love. Rather than restrictive, commitment becomes the necessary context for radical intimacy that can trust the beloved to not walk away. With this understanding, sexual energy is a sacred power, a potentiality that enables love to bring life. Each human person can hope for love relationships that are enduring, passionate and joyful. The tensions so present in the opening stories disappear, replaced by an embodied understanding of sexuality as created by God and intended to incarnate love for life and blessing.

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The Family

as a Facilitator of Sexual Health and Integration

Michael Luebbert, Ph.D.



In the realm of sexual development, families mediate both grace (integration) and sin (disintegration). We approach a state of grace in our never-ending process of sexual development when, through self-consciousness, knowledge, motivation, commitment and skill we achieve a state of relative wholeness or integration that allows us to live our sexuality in a way congruent with our spiritual values. In contrast, we approach a state of sin in the process of ongoing sexual development, when, through a lack of self-consciousness, ignorance, apathy, lack of commitment and ineptitude we default to a state of fragmentation or disintegration that prevents us from living out our sexuality in a way congruent with our spiritual values. Formation directors and pastoral ministers have a fiduciary responsibility to enrich and deepen the spiritual lives of their clients—at the very least to do no harm. The challenge of ministering to the wounded sexuality of our protégés is fraught with peril if we ourselves are not on the road to ongoing sexual awareness described above. We, too, were formed sexually by parents, families, communities, and congregations steeped both in sin and grace. Many of us have also been deeply wounded in our sexual lives. As we undertake the task of helping others stay on the road toward healthy sexual development and ongoing sexual integration, we too need to take stock of the state of knowledge, self-awareness, and skills that we can bring to the task of serving others in this wounded but important dimension of experience.

To understand the way that families promote/inhibit healthy sexual development and help/hinder their children in developing habits supportive of sexual integration requires a prior understanding of neurobiological systems and related processing tasks that are necessary for the achievement of ongoing sexual integration. This article will discuss five areas critical to an understanding of how families set their offspring on a trajectory either toward sexual integration or disintegration: (1) neurobiological systems of sexual desire, (2) the role of prefrontal cortex in sexual integration, (3) the role of emotional intelligence in sexual integration, (4) the role of the family as a shaper of sexual bonds, and (5) the effects of parenting style on sexual integration.

In the past twenty years, neurobiologists have learned a great deal about brain systems involved with the expression of sexual desire (Amen, 2007). Researchers have found that sexual desire is rooted in three distinct emotion-motivation systems in the human brain, i.e., lust, attraction and attachment, each of which expresses a unique dimension of human desiring (Panksepp, 1998). Lust refers to a desire for sexual gratification, attraction correlates with infatuation or a craving for emotional union with the beloved, and attachment refers to the forging of a bond with a love object. Each of these distinct systems of desire is mediated by the actions of specific neurotransmitters. Lust is associated with a craving for sexual gratification, which is mediated by estrogens and androgens; attraction, which is experienced subjectively as "falling in love," is mediated by elevated levels of dopamine and norepinephrine and decreased levels of serotonin; and attachment, which is associated with a desire for proximity to the beloved as a source of comfort in a situation of distress, is mediated by the neuropeptides oxytocin and vasopressin.

Because these three distinct systems of desiring are not automatically integrated into a unified process through the course of living, sexual disintegration can take many forms. Many young people engage in sexual activities with dating partners early in relationships, not realizing that the bonding effects of oxytocin will work even though it is far from certain that the other person is an appropriate or compatible life partner. Many marital affairs occur when one partner realizes that sexual attraction or romance has disappeared from the marriage and s/he concludes that his/her marriage is fatally flawed. Knowledge of the various systems of sexual desire can potentially provide young adults with a reason to move slowly into physical intimacy. It also provides a potentially stabilizing awareness for individuals feeling a cooling of the fires of passion and romance, giving them time to rebuild the relationship in a way that triggers the associated brain systems anew. Knowing that oxytocin is released

through physical touch and, especially for the male, in orgasm, may motivate bonded lovers to keep oxytocin at peak levels through regular sexual union. Knowledge of the three systems of desire provides married lovers with a rationale for a relaxed, hopeful, and attentive focus on their sexual lives, knowing that if both partners persist in tithing their time, emotional availability, and creativity to their sexual relationship, there will once again be wonderful moments where all three systems fire concurrently. Although such moments may be experienced as pure grace, in reality, when they occur, they are the result of a confluence of skill, motivation, commitment, and external events over which we may have limited control.

THE ROLE OF THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX IN SEXUAL INTEGRATION

While human sexual desiring is mediated through the aforementioned three distinct systems of desire, healthy sexual integration is achieved through the conscious activities of the frontal lobe. As Antonio DeMasio (1999) has noted, the human body-brain system heads toward a kind of equilibrium, which is built by an integration of unconscious body/brain processes into a unified whole. In his book, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio (1999) notes that consciousness is rooted in the integration and smooth functioning of a complex network of brain and body processes in achieving a state of equilibrium. In lower primates and mammals, this equilibrium is achieved through body-brain processes that are more or less unconscious and automatized. In human beings, these processes reach consciousness, which allows self-awareness and the possibility of free choice. The prefrontal cortex is the brain area where consciousness finds most direct expression as emotions and impulse become the content of consciousness, allowing a menu of choices to arise which serve personal and societal values. The prefrontal cortex is the realm of executive functioning, where problems are identified and solved, inconsistencies and infidelities can be named, where emotions and impulses toward immediate gratification can be checked, and where the entire flow and direction of consciousness can be oriented to higher order values and goals.

Damasio notes that the human capacity for judgment, which is a prerequisite for the successful integration of experience, depends, to a large extent, on the capacity of the frontal lobe to integrate emotional responses, i.e., gut feelings, with other cognitive data. Indeed, Damasio's research has shown that damage to certain areas of the prefrontal cortex that process emotions destroys the individual's capacity for making good judgments. Therefore, parenting oriented to healthy sexual development/integration must help the child connect up his/her spontaneous emotional responses such as empathy/fear/shame/love to higher order values. Sexual integration is dependent, therefore, on the prior, carefully nurtured capacity for self-and-other-awareness made accessible in habits of personal reflection.

Parents who are seeking to promote healthy sexual development/integration must be willing to model a willingness to identify, own, and modify selfish or destructive behavior in an ongoing process of personal growth. In doing so, they model for their children a sense of humility based in acceptance of one's personal imperfections, a capacity for empathy toward others, an awareness and an ability to process painful emotions such as shame, guilt, fear and hate, and an ability to work toward the repair of damaged relationships. The establishment of habits of healthy self-and-other-awareness in our children depends to a great extent in our attainment of these same habits due to our tendency to pass on our habits, attitudes and behaviors unconsciously to our offspring.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SEXUAL FORMATION/ INTEGRATION

In his seminal work, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman (1995) identifies five basic areas of emotional intelligence, including knowing one's emotions, managing one's emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and managing emotions in others. Goleman's work on emotional intelligence dovetails nicely with neurobiologist Antonio Damasio's insights into the process by which emotions are transformed into feelings.

In a family committed to the healthy sexual development of its children, parents will seek to promote emotional awareness in their children.

Damasio points out that emotions unfold in the theater of the body. As such, emotions are inherently unconscious and automatized routines designed by evolution to solve survival-relevant problems. When emotions become conscious, through the mediation of language, however, they are available to be transformed into conscious feelings, unfolding as they do in the theater of the mind/body. In a family committed to the healthy sexual development of its children, parents will seek to promote emotional awareness in their children with an aim to promoting the development of the child's ability to name emotions and sexual impulses, thereby increasing his/her insight and consciousness in the area of sexuality.

Neurobiologists have also discovered that human beings are hardwired for empathy (Goleman, 2006). Research suggests that emotional processing areas of the human brain are populated with mirror neurons which fire automatically when we encounter another person in pain. Indeed, researchers believe that the same neurons fire in the person when s/he is witnessing another person in pain or when s/he is experiencing pain. The functioning of mirror neurons makes emotions contagious. Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the minds of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct stimulation, by feeling, not by thinking. Empathy itself has three dimensions: (1) knowing what another person is feeling; (2) feeling what the other person is feeling, and (3) responding compassionately to the other person. If empathy is hardwired into the brain, how can the lack of empathy in human relationships be explained? In the area of sexual behavior, a variety of things can interrupt the habitual functioning of empathy such as choosing not to value the other, a sense of entitlement, deviant sexual arousal and ideation, a tendency to objectify the other, compartmentalization of sexual experience from other areas of experience and a lack of sexual integration.

Neurobiologists have discovered that emotions are processed by the human brain on many levels, including a "low road" circuit that passes through an interlocking system of emotional brain centers and a "high road" circuit that depends heavily on the operation of the prefrontal cortex. Acting as the brain's "low road" radar, the amygdala, a part

of the emotional brain system, calls attention to whatever is new, puzzling or potentially threatening. The amygdala scans the environment and asks if something or someone is safe or dangerous. This scanning process is automatized, preconscious and much faster than conscious problem-solving processes associated with the prefrontal cortex. At the same time that information is being processed by the amygdala, it takes a slower, high road to the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex subjects the data of experience to a slow, methodical, step-by-step process of analysis in which goals, values, motives, intentions, consequences, and pros and cons are subject to scrutiny (Goleman, 2006).

Families that are successful in situating their children on a road to sexual health and integration no doubt use a combination of low and high road approaches to sexual formation. The parent's influence over the child's emerging sexual behavior will be maximized when s/he has successfully calibrated or tuned the child's low road emotional circuits to tacit standards of trust, empathy, openness, mutual respect and reverence for others. Of course a parent's most powerful tool for accomplishing this calibration is the parent-child relationship. If the child internalizes a sense of reverent acceptance of self and others from a securely attached relationship with parents, high road arguments for virtuous sexual behavior provided by parents, teachers or religious educators will make more sense because the arguments are congruent with gut-level intuitions about how self and others should be treated. If low road emotional circuits are destructively calibrated through abusive, neglectful or insecurely attached relationships, which mirror a lack of reverence for self or others, arguments meant to reinforce healthy and reverent sexual behavior will likely be experienced by the young adult as coercive, manipulative, or controlling, and will likely be rejected to protect the freedom and integrity of the self.

THE FAMILY AS A SHAPER OF ATTACHMENT BONDS

Following the lead of Freud and Erikson, attachment researchers such as John Bowlby (1969) and Mary Ainsworth (1978) opened new avenues

of insight into the importance of the parent-child bond for the emergence and development of the human personality. Attachment researchers discovered that, by the end of the first year of life, virtually all infants become attached to a caregiver because the nervous system is biased to developing interpersonal bonds or attachments. Neurobiologists, working independently of attachment researchers, found that the capacity to form parent-child bonds is in-born in mammals and is mediated by oxytocin, a chemical secreted in the mother's brain during childbirth, forming the chemical basis for the mother-child bond. Researchers point out that oxytocin also floods the mother's brain during breast feeding, is released by physical touch and tenderness, and is released in the male's brain at the point of orgasm.

Attachment researchers have found that by the time the infant is eighteen to twenty-four months old, the lava flow of his/her primordial desire begins to cool and the infant brain begins creating a stable, although potentially changeable, channel through which relational desire and understanding will flow across the lifespan. Empirical studies by Mary Ainsworth (1978) identified three distinct attachment styles exhibited by infants in response to associated parenting behaviors: secure attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, and anxious-resistant attachment. In response to a stressful laboratory situation created by Ainsworth, involving the separation of an eighteen-month-old infant from its mother and a brief exposure to a stranger, secure infants, although highly upset at their mother's departure, exhibited a capacity to turn to their mothers for soothing and comfort which enabled them to return quickly to goal-oriented play.

In contrast, anxious-avoidant infants displayed little distress at their mother's departure and did not turn to her for soothing and comfort on her return. Ainsworth found that anxious-avoidant infants learned to hide their emotional responses and needs, and essentially attempted to deny their needs for contact and support with attachment figures, pretending to themselves and to others that "all is well." However, they found that the denial-based survival of anxious-avoidant infants came at a price as their

anger went underground where, over time, it tended to erode self-esteem and trust in others. As a result of their early relational experiences, these infants developed self-protective deficits in recognizing their own emotions or the emotions of others.

In turn, anxious-resistant infants responded with severe distress at the departure of their mothers. However, upon the mother's return, although they clung to her, they did not allow themselves to be soothed or comforted, and seemed to focus inordinately on ensuring that their mothers would not escape them again. Researchers found that anxious-resistant infants, in turn, tended to exhibit an under-regulated emotional style. Such infants learned to display intense negative emotions without any clear expectation of getting their needs met. As anxious-resistant infants grew up, they tended to develop a relational style characterized by poor relational boundaries and a chaotic, destructive emotional life.

Ainsworth found that attachment security in infancy was correlated with empathically attuned, attentive and loving caregivers who met the infant's need for physical contact, emotional soothing and support in response to distress. Ainsworth believed that, in response to parental availability and emotional attunement in stressful situations, securely attached infants developed internal working models of self and others that reflected parental reliability, empathy, sensitivity and care. In contrast, Ainsworth found that insecure attachment (anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant) bonds to caretakers were correlated with a lack of parental attunement to the infant's needs, use of harsh and punitive discipline, experiences of rejection and/or neglect, unclear or ever-changing expectations, or inconsistent structure in the parent-child relationship. Infants experiencing a subset of these parental behaviors developed internal working models of self and others, which solidified into negative feelings about the self or in negative expectations for subsequent intimate relationships.

Attachment research investigating the romantic relationships of adults has subsequently found that individuals with secure relational bonds are relatively successful in forming long-term, satisfying committed relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987).

Such individuals tend to be accepting of their lover's faults, view others as well-intentioned and good-hearted and have fewer divorces. Having experienced empathy, acceptance and close bonds with their parents, such individuals have a deep capacity for intimacy with others.

Individuals exhibiting an ambivalent or preoccupied attachment style in adulthood (the correlate of anxious-resistant attachment in infants) experienced a lack of confidence in the responsiveness of others to their needs early in life. As adults, such individuals come to be perpetually afraid of being abandoned in their adult romantic relationships. Consequently, such individuals devote an excessive amount of emotional energy to keeping others close in romantic relationships. In contrast, adults with a dismissing attachment style (the correlate of anxious-avoidant attachment in infancy) tended to avoid intimate social contacts.

Such individuals were found to rely on defense mechanisms such as avoidance, contempt, denial, intellectualization, and projection to manage painful emotional experiences. Such individuals were phobic of intimacy, tended to keep an emotional distance in potentially intimate relationships, had problems with commitment, tended to engage in brief sexual encounters, and were prone to participating in uncommitted sexual relationships (see Hazan and Shaver for a more complete discussion of this topic).

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTING STYLE ON SEXUAL FORMATION

As a clinical psychologist with many years of experience in evaluating clergy/ministerial candidates, I have found it useful to ask questions designed to probe two important areas, which I have found tend to be linked in a predictable manner: (1) the parenting style of the candidate's parents and (2) candidate's attachment style. In my own practice, this strategy has repeatedly confirmed the insight of attachment researchers about the importance of the quality of the parent-child relationship on the formation of the child's internal working models of self and other, which subsequently guide the individual's relational expectations and shape sexual behavior both on the broadest relational level and the most narrow genital level.

In her foundational research, Baumrind (1971) identified three basic parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive/inconsistent. Authoritative parenting style can be understood as creating a basically democratic family structure in which the parents are the co-presidents with ultimate veto power and children are allowed to influence parents through a limited although legitimized legislative/lobbying process. Authoritative parenting is associated with high and clear parental expectations, fair and predictable consequences, emotional sensitivity, open communication, and mutual respect in the parent-child relationship. In such a relationship, a discussion of sexual attitudes, beliefs or behaviors by the parent and child has a good chance of occurring because the child has a clear sense that this delicate area of the self will not be unduly bruised or shamed into hiding.

By contrast, an authoritarian parenting style effectively creates a kind of dictatorship in which parents function as all-powerful tyrants. Like the authoritative parenting style, the authoritarian parenting style also sets out high and clear expectations; however, the authoritarian parent may administer consequences in an unfair, punitive, and arbitrary manner that is emotionally insensitive and disrespectful of the feelings and desires of the child. If such a fear-based relationship develops, discussions of sexual attitudes or behaviors are not likely to be open.

In contrast, the permissive-inconsistent parenting style creates a kind of familial vacuum best described in political terms as anarchy. Due to parental incapacity, fueled by one or more noxious influences, including mental illness, substance abuse, traumatic history, domestic violence or a destructive relational history, the parent feels unable to set realistic expectations and boundaries necessary for the healthy development of a child. Such parents tend to alternate between relating to their children as friends and allowing their children to rule family dynamics through establishing inappropriate closeness to caretakers or through the outright bullying of caretakers. Consequently, unhealthy or blurred boundaries may ensue, putting family members at increased risk for sexual boundary violations.

In my evaluation of ministerial candidates, I have found that securely attached candidates typically had parents who utilized an authoritative parenting style. My best understanding of this fact is that an authoritative parenting style supports the development of high level thinking (executive functioning), high levels of emotional awareness, emotional processing and empathy (high emotional intelligence), and secure relational bonds, which are essentially the basic building blocks and skills necessary for achieving healthy sexual integration later in life. In the area of sexual formation, authoritative parenting supports the development of internalized controls for impulse and emotional expression. Authoritative parents set firm expectations for their children, actively engage their children



in a process of exploring pros and cons related to conflicting choices, and follow through with proportionate consequences when parental expectations are not met. In the authoritative parenting style, the child learns that feelings, urges and desires are capable of being named, modified and channeled into pro-social outlets. The authoritative parent actively seeks to communicate to the child that his/her experience, feelings, and desires are important, valued and acceptable. The successful authoritative parent builds a strong relationship with the child which allows the securely attached child to approach in moments of confusion, pain or failure with the expectation that, while limits or consequences will be enforced, the core self will never be attacked, shamed or ridiculed. The trust developed over time between parent and child provides the developing

adolescent with opportunities for discussion of sexual feelings, relational opportunities, and accompanying risks. Because love and acceptance are woven so tightly into the parent-child relationship and because problem solving and deferral of gratification in the service of long-term goals has been effectively modeled by the parents and deeply internalized by the child, the child is well equipped to defer sexual experience until full commitment to another in love is possible, including care for any offspring who might result from sexual union.

In my evaluations of ministerial candidates as well as my evaluations of sex offenders in a correctional setting, I have found that individuals from families where an authoritarian parenting style predominated tend to have rebellious, destructive relational histories; they tend to display deficits in self-awareness, lack a deep capacity for empathy, and, under stress, evince a tendency to distort and/or compartmentalize thought processes. Because the authoritarian parenting style is based on fear and compliance, pro-social behavior is extracted from the child in the presence of external threats, monitoring and punishment. In such a family system, the child learns to hide authentic feelings, yearnings and urges because their expression is likely to trigger control responses, ridicule, shaming or punishment by parents. Not unexpectedly, individuals raised in such families have had to hide painful areas of feeling and experience from themselves and others.

Attachment-informed research and clinical experience suggest that unattuned, judgmental and unempathic parents following an authoritarian parenting style will likely produce children with deficits in self-reflection, deficits in self-acceptance, and gaps in emotional intelligence. Attachment-informed clinical practice and research suggest that such deficits are pathogenic with an avoidant/dismissing attachment style. Such individuals learn to shut down and hide from themselves and others their authentic feelings, urges and impulses, which their parents have signaled are unacceptable or even bad. In such parent-child relationships, anger goes underground, where it erodes self-esteem and lays the foundation for hostility and aggression toward authority figures and, in some cases, toward future

partners. Such individuals develop an over-regulated emotional style that can lead to a neglect of one's emotional life or an inability to recognize one's emotions or the emotions of others. Such an emotionally tone-deaf individual is moving down the road that leads to deficits in empathy that can lead to uncaring or even predatory sexual behavior. These same individuals, who felt rejection and judgment instead of attunement and love from their parents, have difficulties in forming deep bonds with partners. Instead of entering into relationships in which the three systems of sexual desire are integrated into a coherent identity, such individuals tend to enter into serial sexual relationships that lack depth or purpose beyond numbing one's psychic wounds or providing erotic diversion from the boredom of a rootless life.

Likewise, the permissive/inconsistent parenting style is unlikely to produce children with a capacity for healthy sexual integration. Whereas the authoritarian parenting style highlighted the use of external control, threats and punishment to exact behaviors congruent with parental wishes, the permissive/inconsistent parenting style errs by failing to provide the child with consistency, structure and fairness/predictability as per expected consequences for potentially destructive choices. Attachment informed therapy and research suggest that infants subjected to permissive/inconsistent parents learn to display intense negative emotions without any clear expectation of getting their needs met. In the matrix of such a parent-child relationship, the child develops an under-regulated emotional style, which leads to conflicts and to the damaging of primary relationships. When parents, exhibiting a preoccupied/ambivalent attachment style, fail to model good boundaries, exhibit deficits in emotional awareness and emotional control, display deficits in deferring immediate gratification and fail to model self-reflection and problem-solving in the service of high values—the seeds of a chaotic, self-destructive sexual life are sown.

IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS FORMATION AND MINISTRY

When it functions properly, the family is the primary facilitator of

healthy sexual formation. To achieve this end, the family needs a great deal of support. Perhaps the biggest threat to the family's ability to meet this challenge is the noxious influence of media and public culture, which trivializes and manipulates sexuality for economic motives. The current article highlights the importance of family relationships in the formation of attachment bonds, which send our children on relational trajectories heading for sin (unconsciousness, shame and disintegration) or grace (consciousness, self-acceptance and integration). As we have seen, the process of forming these attachment bonds also calibrates the emotional brain for tasks and sensitivities integral to healthy sexual relationships (emotional intelligence) and lays the foundation for higher level thinking (prefrontal cortex) so necessary for discernment and commitment. In parenting style, we find an instrument suited to the unfolding of early attachment bonds into deeply internalized patterns of emotional awareness, self-esteem and strategies for attaining intimacy in close relationships.

Awareness of the processes by which the family facilitates sexual formation should provide ministers and religious formation directors with "red flags" to notice in walking through family histories with candidates. It is hoped that awareness of these processes would not lead anyone to the false conclusion that an individual's capacity for sexual integration can be calibrated or changed merely by convincing the individual to adopt pious practices, exposing him or her to ecclesial teachings, providing didactic seminars or imparting scientific, religious, or philosophical ideas—indeed, even the information presented in this article. The information in this article has highlighted the foundational importance of relationships for shaping and, hopefully, for reshaping our beliefs, attitudes and expectations in the area of human sexuality. While some candidates may be able to their reshape attachment style, recalibrate the emotional brain, build new emotional intelligence competencies and reprogram the prefrontal cortex through wholesome friendships and an enriched set of formation experiences, others may need intensive therapeutic work to make such changes. One thing is certain, given the noxious effects of the recent sexual abuse scandal on reli-

gious congregations and denominations around the world, going forward we cannot afford to continue missing the signposts for attaining sexual health and integration, which have been hiding from us in plain sight on the shelves of scientific journals and in the holy, passionate, committed, authentically-lived sexual lives of many lay persons.

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Knowing One's

The poet Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer, writes compellingly of our need for what he calls "local adaptation," what we perhaps think of as having roots. Local adaptation, he claims, is the opposite of "self-discovery as an isolated or autonomous individual," that perilous quest of modern times. Rather,

It has everything to do with discovering where one

Wendell Berry reminds us, as concrete and embodied persons, of the importance of place. This was borne in upon me in my recent opportunity of a lifetime, to spend ten days in the Holy Land. To walk a trail through tall dry grass and thistles, down a slope along Lake Galilee, is to be quietly excited because Jesus walked there. The reality impinges on you.

I and my fellow pilgrims found the same to be true on the ground in Jericho, with its sycamores and palm trees. We found it true coming down Mount Olivet, because somewhere here, maybe at the little chapel called *Dominus Flevit*, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, whose temple walls today, rebuilt, still stand out gleaming. Even the ruins of Peter's house, in what was once Capernaum, and of the pool of Bethesda, will return to us as a help to contemplation. That is what we were doing in Israel and the West Bank—feeding future contemplation. In times to come, please God, at every hearing or reading of certain gospel scenes, we will find ourselves there more fully, actively present with the men and women disciples. Ignatian contemplation will be that much more enhanced.

It was hard at Bethlehem to be contemplative; there were so many hawkers in the town and such elbow-to-elbow crowding in the Church of the Nativity. But on the hillside opposite the town, where the lambs still keep their sleep and goats follow the new colonies of sparrows and the willy, one can definitely get that special word, "This is the place!" That feeling was even more intense the night that the Franciscan friar let us into the enclosure of Gethsemane, with its mossy olive-tree trunks. Such a place of awe and pain.

What an undreamed-of privilege, on Calvary, amidst the devotional bric-a-brac, to offer the holy sacrifice as minister of Christ just where it took place. The Negro spiritual came to my mind: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" No, we were not there, alas. Please, you who brought the news with trembling, tell us. For today we are indeed there, as much as we can be, praying for the gift of presence.

The overarching old Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which also includes Calvary, centers upon "the rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried" (Luke 23:53). That cramped space cut into the limestone, the place where Jesus was laid, struck me as far out of my grasp. The corpse was laid there, not the Lord. However, out of this temporary tomb an event exploded more momentous than the Big Bang itself, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus is what engages me today. In his new reality, corporal in some mysterious and hardly fathomable way, at the same time thoroughly divine, Jesus Christ is with me now in my particular place, where I am rooted for ministry and life (for a semi-retirement that is still pretty "semi"!). I do not need to have set foot in Israel and Palestine, embroiled as they still are. Jesus said to Thomas, after all, "Blessed are those who have not seen but have believed." He was alluding to all future

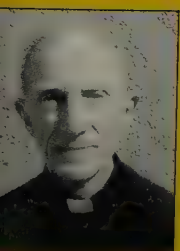


James Torrens, S.J.

Place

...around the world. No, I absolutely did not need to
go, but it sure helps!

A phrase comes back to me now about local adaptation. It
is from Booker T. Washington and well known among Black
Americans: "Put down your buckets where you are." Make the
most of the place where you happen to be planted. If it is your
native place, as it is for Wendell Berry, all the better. Regardless,
it is where the Lord puts you and meets you this very day.
Where you are, his unmistakable voice can be heard, just as
much as in Peter's house or in Melbury with Martha, Mary and
 Lazarus: "Here I am. Now where are you?"



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the diocese.



PASSING THROUGH PENN STATION

I am just back from the tomb
cut in the limestone quarry.
Now how do I orient myself?

I am just back from the hill
where the tree was deep in blind,
and from thick olive trunks
in the midnight garden.

From the lakeshore too
where they pushed in close to hear.

Now in Penn Station, lost
in the humdrum crush,
I wonder if I'm here not there.

Hurriers, how you treasure home!
Having gone to seek it,
I am back to reorient.

James Torrens, S.J.



Telling

William A. Barry, S.J.

I am writing a book about prayer as truth-telling. This approach to prayer follows logically from my belief that God wants our friendship, since friendship is characterized by openness and transparency. One of the chapters is about telling the truth about one's sexuality. In this article I want to use some of the ideas of that chapter as my contribution toward healthier ways of living as sexual beings.

How have you been doing with sexual issues in your own life? Take a few moments to reflect on this question. Have you experienced sexuality as a gift or a problem? What has been your experience of sexuality in relation with God? Have you ever talked openly with God about your sexual identity, your sexual impulses and fantasies, your sexual attractions?

I suspect that many of you are, like me, somewhat conflicted about sexuality. In spite of the sexual revolution that has transformed the landscape of most of the Western world in the past fifty years, many of us are still not really comfortable with sexuality, especially when sexuality is brought into contact with our relationship with God. The discomfort comes from many sources. Not many parents welcomed their children's questions about the differences between girls and boys, for example. Not many were comfortable explaining how babies are made. So, though we were, as children, naturally curious about everything, we quickly realized that sexuality was difficult, if not dangerous, territory. Religious education teachers often were just as uncomfortable in talking

God the Truth About Our Sexuality

about sexuality. Religious teaching often presented sexuality as a minefield full of perils. In my upbringing I never heard anyone in authority in church or school even hint at God's delight in creating us as sexual beings. Religious teaching on sexuality was about what not to do until marriage. Sexuality was more like a road to hell, it seemed, since any sexual activity outside of marriage was a mortal sin. So whatever knowledge of sexuality we got was picked up in furtive conversations with friends, through surreptitious looks at picture magazines, through cinema, or through reading. We older folks did not grow up comfortable with issues of sexuality.

Since the sexual revolution of the 1960's and thereafter younger readers will have had a different experience of learning about sexuality. You will have to speak for yourselves about how comfortable you are about sexuality, and especially about talking honestly with God as a friend about your own sexual desires, fantasies and conflicts. What contact I have had with the younger generation leads me to believe that there is discomfort with sexuality among them, but that it has different origins and, perhaps, a different nature.

Younger people seem to know more about sexuality, and by "know" I mean "have experiential knowledge." Statistics indicate that youngsters engage in sexual exploration much earlier than in my generation and, as a consequence, may be less uptight about sexuality. The media give the impression that sexual expression is taken for granted when two people are attracted to one another. Yet youngsters

are often hurt and bewildered by their experiences of sexual activity. I do not believe that we have yet found out fully what God intends with the gift of sexuality. Thus I dare to hope that even younger people might be helped by this article.

One way to pray is to engage in a dialogue with God as a friend to a friend. That is, one speaks with God as one would speak to a friend from whom no secrets are withheld and from whom one expects some response. This is what I mean by prayer as truth-telling. Someone might say, "Don't we tell God the truth when we confess our sexual sins?" Yes, but that's not the kind of truth-telling I mean here. Few of us, I believe, have tried to tell God the truth about our sexual orientation, desires, impulses and fantasies and listened for God's response. This is the kind of truth-telling I mean. Doing this, I believe, can be a great help, not only to our friendship with God, but also to our becoming comfortable with sexuality and more in tune with God's hopes for us. So let's explore this area.

GOD'S PASSIONATE LOVE

The Song of Solomon or Song of Songs gives us a clue that for biblical authors sexuality is not the taboo subject we have grown used to. If you have not read the book recently, you might want to do so now. It will help you to realize that God is not an enemy of sexual attraction.

The Song is a series of often quite sensual and erotic love poems between a man and a woman interspersed with

reminiscences and internal dialogues of the woman, dialogues between her and the women of Israel, and a few other poems. The lovers describe one another minutely and with graphic images, some of which may make a reader smile while others may begin to rouse an erotic response; these descriptions are sensual and erotic, teasing and flirtatious, but clearly fueled by ardent sexual attraction for one another.

Why this book is in the bible has intrigued Jews and Christian alike over the centuries. The consensus of the tradition has been that these love poems describe the covenantal relationship God wants with the people of Israel. For example, Moses Maimonides, the famous Jewish philosopher of the middle ages, writes that anyone who loves God "is like a lovesick man whose mind is never free from his love for a certain woman and grows in it whether sitting or rising, both when eating and drinking—greater even than this must be the love of God in the heart of his lovers who continually grow more fervent" (cited in Vacek, p. 130). Maimonides then cites the Song of Songs as an allegory on this theme. Maimonides is echoed by many Christian spiritual writers.

While many modern scholars argue that the book is about the human, physical love between a man and a woman, Marvin Pope remarks:

Nevertheless, the instincts and insights that from the beginning led both Christian and Jewish exegetes to relate the language of the Song to divine and superhuman love were

*If we are made
in the image
of God, then
sexuality must
have some
reality in God.*

based on internal evidence
university ignored by recent inter-
preters. Sexuality is a basic
human interest and the defini-
tion that "God is love"
includes all meanings of love
words.

Pope indicates that the words of the First Letter of John "God is love" include all meanings of the words "God" and "love." That means the sexual meaning of the word love as well. Let's try to take him seriously.

In the bible, outside the Song of Songs, there are strong statements of God's passionate, even profligate love for the world, and especially for human beings. These passages use language taken from human love to describe God's love for us. To a sinful people God says through Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3); and through Hosea, "Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.... On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband'" (Hosea 2:14, 16). When the people said that the Lord had forgotten them, God said through Isaiah, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15-16). The love and fidelity of YHWH is described in terms of human passionate

love. Moreover if we are made in the image of God, then sexuality must have some reality in God. I hope that we can discover what this reality might mean by engaging honestly with God about our sexuality.

TALKING TO GOD ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY

Now, let's get a start on how we might go about telling God about our sexual desires, fantasies and attractions.

First, be aware that God is with you, looking at you, waiting for you to become aware. You might tell God something like this: "I would like to become more comfortable talking to you about my sexuality; please help me." If you are feeling any discomfort, just say so and see what happens. Do you feel a bit less nervous? Does God seem interested in knowing more about you? Remember that God made us sexual beings. Perhaps God wants us to share this aspect of our lives and to help us to live more fully and with more joy.

You might be helped by realizing that Jesus and his mother Mary had to come to terms with their sexuality as they grew into adulthood. Perhaps you can speak with Jesus or Mary more easily about your feelings regarding your sexuality.

Now think of someone to whom you are attracted. Try to tell God what attracts you. You might start by describing the person, giving details that



you find attractive. Then you could describe the physical attributes that attract you. Just say whatever comes to mind that you can comfortably say. Do you get the sense that God is listening and interested? If you would like to know God's reactions to your attraction, ask and wait for a response. Once again, you may not hear words, but you may sense something. Just pay attention to what goes on and keep communicating.

If you are married, you might want to talk with God about your spouse and your sexual attraction to him or her. This might feel strange, but remember that your sexual union is part of the sacramental nature of your marriage. Try it and see what happens.

If you are not married and are sexually attracted to someone, try telling God about your attraction, about how you feel in the presence of this person, about your dreams about him or her, and, as you get more comfortable in God's presence, about your sexual attraction. Try to be as concrete as possible. It might help to recall that God made you a sexual person with sexual desires and attractions.

If you are celibate, you know that you also have sexual attractions. Try telling God about them, again as concretely as you can. You, too, were created with sexual desires and attractions.

The point is that all of us, no matter our sexual orientation or our calling in the church are called to live responsibly as sexual beings, knowing how to love others for their sakes and not just for our own, one meaning of the much maligned virtue of chastity. But we cannot do this without the help of God. One way to get that help is to be honest with God about my attractions, even the ones that, if acted on, would be sinful for me.

You can also talk with God about our feelings towards your body and our sexuality. Do you like your body, our looks? Is there something about our body or your looks that troubles you? Do you worry about being found

attractive by others? Just begin to talk to God about your body and your sexuality and see how it goes. As you become more comfortable, you may find more and more to talk about.

Have you talked with God about your sexual orientation? Why not try it now. Just tell God about your sexual attractions. Don't let shame get in the way. We have not chosen our genetic makeup, our parents, the culture into which we were born, or the kind of upbringing we would get. As you open up with God, how do you feel? Do you get a sense of how God reacts?

TELLING GOD ABOUT YOUR ATTRACTIONS

Now let's explore some more difficult issues. We can use one concrete case from the bible. David, the king of Israel, was at home while his army was off on a campaign. He happened to be on the roof of his palace one afternoon when he saw a beautiful woman taking her bath. He found out that she was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite who was on a campaign with David's army. David was strongly attracted to Bathsheba. (See 2 Samuel 11 for the details.) This story may remind you of some times when you were sexually attracted to someone and knew that the other person was sexually off limits for you for whatever reason. David impulsively acted on his desires, bringing Bathsheba into his house and engaging in a sexual relationship with her. When she became pregnant, David brought Uriah back to Jerusalem and tried to get him to sleep with Bathsheba to no avail. Finally, he sent Uriah back to the campaign with a letter to the commander to put Uriah in a dangerous situation and let him be killed.

Suppose that David had talked with God about his sexual attraction to Bathsheba. I suspect that if he had done so, he might have come to his senses. Let's explore the possibility of talking with God about sexual attractions that could lead to sin.

For some masturbation is an activity that is sinful. I know of people who have begun to talk with God about the sexual impulses that usually lead to masturbation. They tell God exactly what is going on in their fantasies and bodies. When they do begin to talk with God, these impulses lose some of their imperiousness. They find themselves, for example, able to sleep after a sexual fantasy begins where before they believed that they could not do so without masturbating. Being open with God about our sexual desires and fantasies is another aspect of our growing friendship.

The same is true when we find ourselves sexually attracted to someone who is, like Bathsheba for David, off limits because of either one's own or the other's prior commitment. We can tell God about the attraction. I mean, tell God about the actual attraction, not how much we may hate ourselves for having such an attraction. David, for example, could have told God how lovely Bathsheba looked and how sexually attracted he was. When you feel such a sexual attraction, I encourage you to talk concretely with God about what is happening in your heart, mind and body. Don't let shame keep you from being as concrete as you can be.

How are you doing? Are you finding these exercises, these ways of telling the truth to God helpful and freeing? I hope so. If you are feeling more free and comfortable, you have something else to tell God. If you are more tense and nervous, you also have something to tell God. However, in this case I suggest that you stop for now and seek out someone whom you trust about your reactions. Sometimes we need more than an article to be able to talk honestly with God about issues of sexuality, and for that matter, aggression. Remember that the purpose of telling God the truth is freedom, especially freedom from fear of one's sexuality.

In his monumental work, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor makes an interesting observation and then a hypothesis, both of which seem to fit the message of this article. The observation: "But whether the propensity to violence is biological or metaphysical, this still leaves an enigma that any Christian understanding must explain: how can human nature as we know it be in the image of God?" In other words, since human beings are propelled to action, often enough, by sexual and aggressive energy, how are we images of God? He then continues with the hypothesis:

Here's a hypothesis from within a Christian perspective: humans are born out of the animal kingdom, to be guided by God; and the males (at least the males) with a powerful sex-drive, and lots of aggression. As far as this endowment is concerned, the usual evolutionary explanation could be the correct one. But being guided by God means some kind of transformation of these drives; not just their repression, or suppression, keeping the lid on them; but some real turning of them from within, conversion, so that all the energy now goes along with God; the love powers agape (selfless love), the aggression turns into energy, straining to bring things back to God, the energy to combat evil (Taylor, p. 668).

In other words, we are descended from the animal kingdom and so are endowed with sexual and aggressive drives that are in need of guidance by God so that we may grow into the human beings we are created to be as images of God. Such guidance cannot be reduced to repression or suppression

of the drives, but entails their conversion to God's purposes in creation. We are not born into a world that is totally in tune with God's purposes; our sexual and aggressive energies, along with much else, have been, as it were, hijacked for other purposes than God's purposes by the one Ignatius of Loyola calls "the enemy of human nature." You might say that the third chapter of the book of Genesis tells the story of how these human energies were hijacked. Human beings succumbed to the temptation of Satan to mistrust God; hence we have tried to use our sexual and aggressive energies and much else to try to gain control of our lives, to save ourselves. Our deepest desire is to want what God wants, but that deepest desire finds itself contending with other desires that have gained a foothold in our hearts, desires at war with the kind of faith and trust in God required to attain what God wants for us and the whole world.

Notice that Taylor presumes that our aggressive and sexual drives are God-given; they are somehow part of the image of God we are. So our tendency to be ashamed of our sexual or aggressive impulses is off the mark; we need not be ashamed of gifts given us by God to live in this world. We are images of God; our aggressive and sexual drives must be part of what God saw was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Yet unbridled aggression and sexual expression are a threat to all that we hold dear; they can destroy families, communities, nations and even our world as we know it. As Taylor makes clear, we have tried to control them through laws, cultural mores, games, repression, sublimation, drugs, religious indoctrination, psychotherapy, etc. without notable effect. These attempts at control of sex and aggression have led at times to a rebellion against all attempts at control with no better results for the human race or the planet. Whatever maturity we have achieved, Taylor believes, has been through God's patient pedagogy,

rather than through our bungling attempts to put the lid on or to remove all controls altogether. I wonder whether it is not time for us to try another route, a route that has not been tried on a large scale in the history of the world. I am referring to an attempt on our part to cooperate consciously with God's pedagogy by bringing our sexual and aggressive impulses into a direct relationship with God. This article invites readers to try telling God the truth about our sexual desires, reactions and fantasies in order to cooperate with God's patient pedagogy.

RECOMMENDED READING

Barry, W. *A Friendship Like No Other: Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2009.

Pope, M. *The Anchor Bible. Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977, 17.

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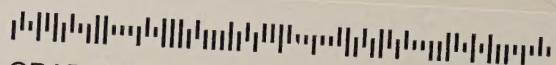
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